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The American University in Cairo  
School of Global Affairs and Public Policy

# A Tale of Two Somali Community-Based Organizations in Cairo

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Between Assistance, Agency & Community Formations

A Thesis submitted to the  
Center for Migration and Refugee Studies

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
The degree of Master of Arts  
in Migration and Refugee Studies

Hannah Huser

Under the supervision of Dr. Hanan Sabea

April 2014

The American University in Cairo  
School of Global Affairs and Public Policy

A Tale of Two Somali Community-Based Organizations in Cairo – Between Assistance,  
Agency & Community Formations

A Thesis Submitted by  
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Submitted to the Center for Migration and Refugee Studies

May 2014

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
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# Dedication

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*I dedicate this thesis to all Somalis who informed, advised, participated and assisted me in this journey.*

*&*

*In memory of Hayat*

# Acknowledgments

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First and foremost, I wish to thank the people at the heart of this thesis. I was warmly welcomed in both the Somali Association for Women and Children and the Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi and like to thank them for their cooperation. The time I spent in both organizations did not only constitute opportunities of research, but gave me, above all, the privilege to meet amazing and dedicated people. My encounters with them have been sources of inspiration and learning that will certainly guide me throughout my life.

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# Abstract

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Based on ethnographic field research in two Somali refugee- and migrant-initiated community-based organizations (CBOs) in Cairo, I look at their role in community formations, assistance to refugees and creating linkages to service providers to refugees. Moreover, I explore the CBOs as sites of individual agency and as expressions of collective action at the organizational level. CBOs have been explored from various conceptual angles, including networking, social capital, and integration. The manifestation of CBOs can be influenced by endogenous and exogenous factors, raising questions as to where CBOs can be located between genuine sites of identity construction and community-building and their externally-induced fabrication as such. Individual and collective agency cannot be removed from the internal and external structural conditions and power dynamics either.

A comparison of the two CBOs under investigation shows that community formation at the organizational level can manifest itself in various forms. Somalis' identity construction, based on the mutually influencing factors of refugeeeness and *soomaalinimo*, inform understandings of community and the role of the CBOs in it. At the same time, the spatial location of CBOs as well as CBO-internal dynamics can influence notions of community and the nature of community enactment. Moreover, the CBOs exhibit different forms of decision-making structures as well as degree of institutionalization which influences the position and agency of actors within them.

Overall, the CBOs can be seen as sites of community formation and allow their members to exert agency by defying notions of the helpless and dependent refugee. The CBOs fulfill various functions as providers of education, assistance and information and as linkages between Somali refugees and refugee service providers. Their degree of institutionalization, however, influences the way they are acknowledged and supported by humanitarian actors. The findings show that community outreach approaches of institutions such as UNHCR and other NGOs can provide opportunities as well as risks for CBOs depending on their position inside or outside the humanitarian framework. It urges us to look at how current approaches prioritize certain outlooks of CBOs over others, thereby dismissing the important functions of less structured and more locally-situated CBOs.

Against the background of restrictive rights, limited livelihood opportunities and minimal assistance for refugees in cities such as Cairo, and the recognition that camp-based models are largely ineffective in urban refugee settings, the research is a timely contribution to exploring CBOs as sustainable community-based formations of support and alternatives to the mainstream humanitarian regime. The research, thereby, shows that CBOs cannot be seen as unitary entities, but can take differing forms, and functions for their members, highlighting the importance of flexible approaches towards CBOs when viewing them as actors within urban refugee contexts.

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# Foreword

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*A conversation of “us” with “us” about “them” is a conversation in which “them” is silenced. “Them” always stands on the other side of the hill, naked and speechless, barely present in its absence. Subjects of discussion, “them” is only admitted among “us”, the discussing subjects, when accompanied or introduced by an “us.”<sup>1</sup>*

My own work and research experiences with refugees in Cairo, Israel and elsewhere have shown me that the term ‘refugee’ carries a heavy baggage. The term constitutes a playing fields within which the management of, and advocacy for, those designated with the label takes place. People working in the field of humanitarian aid, mainly ‘from outside’, use the term frequently and easily. Thereby, the impression arises that the refugees they refer to are transferred to the realm of abstract categories; people are talked about as a concept. Certainly, this category is a necessary vocabulary to be used in the battle to advocate for the rights of those who inhabit this category and their access to services and protection. It is like a vital title that people who seek asylum need to acquire and prove that they are credible to hold in order to obtain benefits and attention. In this process, however, complexities of these people’s lives often seem to fade away, leaving in place a reduced identity of a person as a refugee, as a category. This title is, however, what almost all asylum seekers coming to Egypt want and claim, as it opens the door for them to receive a little bit more help or be resettled.

Terms such as ‘refugee’, ‘migrant’, ‘community’ and ‘agency’ have become ubiquitous concepts used across many scholarly disciplines, as well as in various human rights, advocacy, humanitarian and policy discourses. They have become what Raymond Williams calls ‘keywords.’ According to Williams, keywords are significant, indicative

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<sup>1</sup>Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Women, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 67.

binding words that help us in understanding societies and cultures.<sup>2</sup> However, far from being static, neutral or monolithic, keywords are constantly contested and in flux, vexed with multiple meanings, carrying various emotive associations and reflecting different ideological standpoints. Before engaging in any discussion that involves these concepts it is, therefore, arguably crucial to understand how concepts, or keywords, are utilized, in which context they emerge, for what purposes they are used, and what effects they may have.

It seems too obvious to say – but nevertheless worth to stress – that language does not occur in a vacuum. Ahearn reminds us of the constitutive interplay between language, society and culture stressing that “discourse both shapes and is shaped by sociocultural factors and power dynamics.”<sup>3</sup> Hence, language and discourse must be contextualized in the specific cultural, social and political setting or environment in which they occur. A term such as ‘refugee’ can mean one thing for some and something else for others. Some might not even be familiar with the term, but use other expressions.

Concepts constitute a prime instrument of communication that can be used intentionally by people to convey certain meanings and messages, to influence and to manipulate, to persuade and to mobilize. Hence, it is important to look at the power dynamics that underlie the discourses in which such concepts are used. To reference Bourdieu, language can attain a ‘symbolic power’ when people are able to express themselves in such a way as to convince others and make them believe. Symbolic power, however, does necessitate authority of the speaker or institution. Bourdieu stresses that symbolic power can only occur if the language in question is recognized by others as superior over other forms of

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<sup>2</sup>Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>3</sup>Laura M. Ahearn, "Language and Agency," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30 (2001): 111.

speaking, consciously or even unconsciously as a result of taken-for-granted established hierarchies.<sup>4</sup>

Power dynamics also mean that discourse can be exclusive. What intrigues me about the quote of Minh-ha at the beginning is the observation that those talked about are often not part of the discourse that surrounds them. The ‘subjects of discussion’ themselves can only enter the arena of discourse when the ‘discussing subjects’ allow for it. On the one hand, it raises questions of representation. On the other hand, it underlines that some might have the power to speak while others do not. I am not claiming that ‘the subjects of discussion’ are completely voiceless recipients of language and its effects. Butler makes a valid point when rejecting the claim that “speech *enacts* domination.”<sup>5</sup> Speech uttered by some leaves room to be resisted, re-contextualized and exploited by others who can “turn one part of that speaking against the other.”<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, Trinh’s statement still leaves in place the observation that more often than not it is the case that those in power are those who are most loudly heard, while those who are most affected by the discourse of the powerful need someone else – activists, journalists, academics and the like – to make them heard.

While language can be resisted in the sense that Butler speaks about, namely that spoken words do not simultaneously constitute intended effects and can be countered, such resistance becomes arguably more difficult when keywords or concepts attain an institutionalized meaning. Zetter, for instance, explains how bureaucratic interests and procedures of humanitarian agencies “are themselves crucial determinants in the definition of labels like refugees.”<sup>7</sup> Although such concepts can equally be resisted and re-employed, the institutionalization of certain concepts, a process which Zetter calls ‘labelling’, constitutes a

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<sup>4</sup>Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* [Ce que parler veut dire], ed. John Thompson, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge: Polity, 1991).

<sup>5</sup>Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 18 (italics in original).

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>7</sup>Roger Zetter, "Labelling Refugees: Forming and Transforming a Bureaucratic Identity," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 4, no. 1 (1991): 41.

highly instrumental process which contributes to the socialization of refugees with certain identities.<sup>8</sup> In this process, labels or keywords cannot only impose certain identities,<sup>9</sup> but with it also impact on the conditions of those people who are framed within them. As Fraser and Gordon argue, “terms that are used to describe social life are also active forces in shaping it.”<sup>10</sup> By using concepts and keywords, one participates in negotiating and contesting social experiences. Such concepts and keywords, thereby, often “carry unspoken assumptions and connotations that can powerfully influence the discourses they permeate.”<sup>11</sup>

The main message that I want to take out of the aforementioned discussion is that it is crucial to pay attention to concepts and social categories, the way they are constructed through language and discourse, and instrumentalized by different actors for specific purposes. Throughout my thesis, I critically engage with terms such as ‘refugee’ and ‘community’. While I do not claim to be able to fully discard the dominating role of the discussing subject, I try to incorporate the subjective views of the research participants. It is an attempt to acknowledge the complexities and ambivalences of these terms which are all too often used in a frivolous manner.

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Zetter, "Labelling Refugees"; Roger Zetter, "More Labels, Fewer Refugees: Remaking the Refugee Label in an Era of Globalization," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 20, no. 2 (2007).

<sup>10</sup>Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, "Decoding 'Dependency': Inscriptions of Power in a Keyword of the US Welfare State," in *Reconstructing Political Theory: Feminist Perspectives*, eds. Mary Lyndon Shanley and Uma Narayan (Cambridge, U.K.: Polity Press, 1997): 26.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

## A Note on Linguistics

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The Somali language was originally a verbal language. A written script was only introduced in 1972, based on the Latin script. However, in part due to the heavy influence of the Arabic language, the Latin script cannot account for all Somali sounds. To incorporate such sounds, a few alterations were made. For instance, the Latin letter 'c' stands for a glottal stop, similarly to the Arabic letter 'ء' (hamza). The Somali name 'Cali' would be written in English as 'Ali'. The Latin letter 'x' is used in the Somali script to designate a strongly aspirated 'h,' giving the sound of clearing the throat, similarly to the Arabic letter 'ح'. Hence, 'Nastexa' is more or less pronounced like 'Nasteha' while 'Cilmi' is pronounced like 'Ilmi'. In this thesis, I will use the Somali way of writing for names and proverbs.

# Introduction

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On February 26, 2014, I found myself squeezed in a minibus with thirteen Somalis from the ‘Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi’ – a community-based organization (CBO) initiated by Somalis in a neighborhood of Cairo – on my way home from the Cairo International Airport. The Somalis had rented the vehicle to bring their friend and CBO Vice President, Xoriyo, to the airport to wish her farewell on her journey to Canada. Just about half an hour earlier, I had stood in the departure hall of the airport together with over twenty other Somalis to say goodbye to Xoriyo and Diric, a young Somali man who had been volunteering at the ‘Somali Association for Women and Children’ (SAFWAC). The atmosphere had been joyful. A lot of pictures had been taken and the departure hall had been filled with laughter and Somali language. Diric had proudly shown me a golden badge and a frame with pictures of him and members of SAFWAC. They were gifts from the CBO as an appreciation for his engagement as a volunteer English teacher. Leaders and members active in SAFWAC had accompanied him to the airport as well.

Sitting in the bus half an hour later, I remembered how the members of the Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi had told me how little connected they had been before the creation of their CBO. And there they were, on their way back from the airport where they had just departed with one of their most active members, chatting lively with each other and laughing a lot. While their connections and friendships were maybe not totally the result of their engagement in the CBOs, as some knew each other before, this event gave me the feeling that these two CBOs had at least partially something to do with their gathering on that night.

Egypt is one of the few countries in Africa that does not confine refugees and asylum seekers to designated camp or settlement areas.<sup>12</sup> It hosts one of the biggest urban refugee populations in the world today. Due to lack of national asylum policies and general discrimination against foreigners of dark skin, refugees face legal and often also social marginalization.<sup>13</sup> Access to employment, education and health care is limited. Assistance by humanitarian agencies and local or international organizations (IOs) is patchy and often restricted to those considered most vulnerable. Furthermore, the significant political and economic transformations since the ouster of former President Hosni Mubarak in January 2011 as well as general discrimination marked by occurrences of xenophobic outbursts against different refugee populations effects the daily lives of refugees.<sup>14</sup> The overall environment of Cairo, therefore, leaves refugees in a volatile state with meager prospects to integrate.

Refugees often fall back to social networks in order to mitigate socio-economic insecurities and psychosocial challenges of flight and exile, to build livelihood strategies, and to share a sense of belonging and togetherness. Such networks can have multiple manifestations, ranging from informal and loose forms of support to more institutionalized

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<sup>12</sup>An exception constitutes the case those African refugees being kept in Salloum after they had fled the conflict in Libya in 2011.

<sup>13</sup>Mulki Al-Sharmani and Katarzyna Grabska, "African Refugees and Diasporic Struggles in Cairo," in *Cairo Contested. Governance, Urban Space, and Global Modernity*, ed. Diane Singerman, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cairo: American University in Cairo, 2011): 461, 469; Katarzyna Grabska, "Marginalization in Urban Spaces of the Global South: Urban Refugees in Cairo," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 19, no. 3 (2006).

<sup>14</sup>Katarzyna Grabska, *Who Asked them Anyway? Rights, Policies and Wellbeing of Refugees in Egypt* (Brighton: University of Sussex, 2006); Grabska, "Marginalization in Urban Spaces;" Karen Jacobsen, "Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Urban Areas: A Livelihoods Perspective," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 19, no. 3 (2006). Examples of xenophobic sentiments against foreigners include the brutal use of force by the Egyptian police to disperse the sit-in protest of Sudanese in front of the UNHCR in December 2005, leaving twenty-eight people dead (Al-Sharmani and Katarzyna Grabska, "African Refugees and Diasporic Struggles."); violent attacks against Ethiopians (and everyone who looked Ethiopian) during the Egyptian-Ethiopian dispute over the Dam project of Ethiopia in 2013 (Hazel Haddon, "Amid dam row, Ethiopian refugees in Egypt protest rising xenophobia," *AhramOnline*, June 9, 2013, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/73582/Egypt/Politics-/Amid-dam-row,-Ethiopian-refugees-in-Egypt-protest-.aspx>); and arbitrary detention and hostility against Syrians following allegations that a few Syrians participated in protests and violent acts in July 2013 ("UNHCR concerned at arbitrary detention of Syrian refugees in Egypt," UNHCR, July 26, 2013, <http://www.unhcr.org/51f27733540.html>).

association building. Community-based organizations (CBOs), initiated by refugees and migrants themselves, are thereby one such manifestation.

Research of CBOs in Western countries has shown that CBOs can provide different functions. In addition to providing basic services and assistance, they can take an influential role “in rebuilding community and belonging and providing a safe and empowering setting in which individuals and communities may regain confidence.”<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, they can function as sites of local grassroots activism and resistance against marginalization<sup>16</sup> and as alternative spaces for community support and networking outside of the mainstream humanitarian regime.

CBOs can also be explored from the angle to provide platforms for agency, both individual and collective. CBOs may not only provide space for individuals to become active in various forms, but also promote agency of vulnerable people who benefit from their activities in their daily lives. Thereby, it is of interest to look at whether, how and to what extent internal structures and dynamics within the CBOs can influence the relationships between different actors within the CBOs and vice versa. On the other hand, CBOs can also be seen as an expression of collective agency. In this regard, it becomes of interest to what extent they are positioned in the urban refugee policy and service provision context.

One should, however, avoid romanticizing CBOs. The fabrication of CBOs, and refugee and migrant communities more widely, by external institutions as homogeneous entities runs the risk of brushing over complex internal divisions and hostilities that can lead to one-sided representations by dominant groups.<sup>17</sup> One is, therefore, advised to take a critical look at the position of such organizations within ‘refugee communities’ and ask who they

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<sup>15</sup>Gail Hopkins, "Somali Community Organizations in London and Toronto: Collaboration and Effectiveness," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 19, no. 3 (2006): 362.

<sup>16</sup>Umut Erel, *Migrant Women Transforming Citizenship: Life-Stories from Britain and Germany* (Farnham, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009); Ronit Lentin, "Introduction: Immigration in Ireland and Migrant-Led Activism," in *Migrant Activism and Integration from Below in Ireland*, eds. Ronit Lentin and Elena Moreo (Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

<sup>17</sup>Gail Hopkins, "Somali Community Organizations."



serve and for what reasons. Questions of representation, authority and power structures can take influential roles when it comes to agency of individuals within CBOs as well as CBOs in relation to other actors.

In this thesis, I will explore refugee- and migrant-initiated CBO-building through ethnographic research, taking two Somali CBOs as case studies: the ‘Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi’ (alternatively also called Somali community center in Maadi) and the ‘Somali Association for Women and Children’ (SAFWAC). I chose these two CBOs for several reasons. Firstly, the Somali population in Cairo is not only comprised of refugees, but also of students and migrants with Western passports. I wanted to learn more about the relationships between these – as I had already realized – often socio-economically and legally differently positioned ‘groups.’ Secondly, in contrast to the Sudanese population in Cairo, who has a similar composition of refugees, students and migrants, the literature on Somalis is comparatively small. Finally, the two CBOs under investigation differ in size, location and inclusion into the NGO ‘Tadamon – The Egyptian Multicultural Refugee Council’ (Tadamon), allowing for a comparison between both.

### **Significance & Purpose of the Study**

The current research has three main purposes: firstly, to undertake a detailed documentation of the emergence and history of the two CBOs in order to better understand processes of community formation; secondly, to critically examine them as a sites of individual agency and collective action and to examine possible differences, similarities, tensions and synergies between the two; and, thirdly, to locate and examine them within a wider urban refugee policy and service delivery context.

The research is significant for four reasons. Firstly, while refugee- and immigrant-driven CBOs have been studied extensively in the developed countries and especially in the

United Kingdom and Canada,<sup>18</sup> research on CBOs in developing countries is still scarce. Little is known about what function CBOs can take to mitigate insecure security and living conditions of urban refugees in the Global South. Secondly, the literature about Somalis in Cairo is equally limited. Thirdly, it is a timely contribution to thinking about sustainable community-based formations of support when the old model of UNHCR delivering to controlled orderly numbers of people in camps is no longer the primary or appropriate mode of service delivery considering the numbers of urban refugees. Finally, it is turning the spot light towards community driven initiatives as opposed to the over-representation of the role of the state and UNHCR in determining refugees' lives and livelihoods.

### **Research Questions**

1. What different roles can CBOs play for refugees in an urban context?
  - What roles have been identified in the literature concerning CBOs?
  - What are possible opportunities, tensions and risks of collective organizing and seeing CBOs as entities representing refugee 'communities'?
  - What roles do CBOs play in urban refugee policies of UNHCR and other actors?
2. What perceptions, meanings and experiences do research participants attribute to the Somali CBOs in Cairo?
  - How and why were Somali CBOs created?
  - Who are the key figures in the establishment and running of the CBOs?
  - What structural factors influence the organizations positively and negatively?
  - What impact do the CBOs have on individual CBO members and the Somali population as a whole?

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<sup>18</sup>E.g. Hopkins, "Somali Community Organizations;" David Griffiths, Nando Sigona, and Roger Zetter, "Integrative Paradigms, Marginal Reality: Refugee Community Organizations and Dispersal in Britain," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 32, no. 5 (2006).

- What are the internal dynamics in both CBOs concerning organizational structures, decision-making mechanisms and relationship-building of members?
- To what extent do research participants perceive Somalis in Cairo to form a ‘community’? What roles and functions do research participants attribute to the CBOs within such a ‘community’ in Cairo?

### 3. How can the Somali CBOs influence the Cairene refugee context?

- What roles do, and could, CBOs play with regards to assisting refugees and influencing refugee policies?
- How do the CBOs cooperate with UNHCR and other refugee service providers?
- What lessons can be derived for refugee service providers concerning the integration of CBOs in present community outreach and refugee service strategies?
  - How do current urban refugee policies/strategies of UNHCR and other refugee service providers influence CBOs?
  - How can CBOs be supported by UNHCR and other refugee service providers to foster their sustainability and efficacy without endangering CBOs’ ownership and independence?

## **Overview of Chapters**

In Chapter 1, I will engage in a critical discussion on the theoretical approaches that have been used to examine CBOs and agency. CBOs have been analyzed from various angles, including their roles in building networks and social capital and in facilitating integrative processes. Not only endogenous, but also exogenous factors can influence the manifestations of CBOs. The perception and instrumentalization of CBOs as representatives of homogeneous refugee communities bear, thereby, risks of brushing aside internal

heterogeneities, frictions and hierarchical power relations. The concept of agency can be introduced both concerning individual actors within the CBOs as well as CBOs as collective expressions of agency in relation to other actors. Issues of power, authority and structure need to be taken into consideration when examining questions of the capability and flexibility of individual and collective actors to exert agency.

In Chapter 2, I will outline the methods I used, introduce my research sample and describe my research process. In addition, I will discuss ethical considerations, my positionality as a researcher as well as limitations of my research. Chapter 3 will build the contextual ground for both Somalis in Egypt and Cairo as a place of refuge by addressing Egypt's laws and policies affecting refugees and by providing a quick scan the current community outreach approach of the UNHCR Cairo office towards refugees. Moreover, I will describe the historical composition of Somali groups in Cairo and where they are currently mainly concentrated within Cairo. Finally, I will produce brief portraits of the two CBOs which constitute my case studies. Chapter 4 provides an exploration of research participants' understandings of community and forms of community formations within both CBOs. On the one hand, I present how 'refugeeness' and 'Somaliness' drive Somali refugees and migrants to engage in networking with other Somalis and within the two CBOs in particular. Various factors can influence the internal dynamics of CBOs and these, in turn, can inform the flexibility and legitimacy of agency of different actors within the CBOs. In Chapter 5, I position the two CBOs in the wider urban refugee framework of Cairo. This allows me to critically discuss the opportunities, tensions and risks that refugee policy regimes can have with regards to CBOs' structure and ownership. I conclude the chapter by reflecting on some possible ways to support CBOs.

# Chapter 1: Theoretical Orientations

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## 1.1 Defining CBOs

A primary characteristic ascribed to CBOs, one that I equally adopt in this thesis, is that they are founded and led by migrants and refugees themselves. According to Boglio Martinez, CBOs are “membership-based organizations representing the particular interests of groups or localities in which members share in the risks, costs, and benefits of social change efforts, and the leadership is accountable to its members.”<sup>19</sup> In other words, CBOs must be understood as being formed and led by people who face a certain problem, share a common interest and may or may not live within the same geographical locality within which a particular problem arises.

Beyond this point, however, providing a common over-arching definition of what a CBO is and how it looks like is neither easy nor particularly practical due to the fluid nature and diverse forms that CBOs can take.<sup>20</sup> Piciantini is wary of reducing CBOs to static entities and points to the internal dynamics of such organizations.<sup>21</sup> In addition to the fluid and varied forms that CBOs can actually take, the context in which they emerge must arguably be considered. While the CBOs can indeed be led by endogenously evolving desires and interests, one should also consider that their development and outlook can be exogenously influenced. Thus, internal and external factors and power relations as well as the connection of CBOs to various other state and non-state actors should be taken into consideration and will be discussed further below.

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<sup>19</sup>Rafael A. BoglioMartínez, “Grassroots Support Organizations and Transformative Practices,” *Journal of Community Practice* 16, no. 3 (2008): 342.

<sup>20</sup>Carla De Tona and Elena Moreo, “Theorizing Migrant-Led Activism,” in *Migrant Activism and Integration from Below in Ireland*, ed. RonitLentin and Elena Moreo (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 34.

<sup>21</sup>Teresa Piacentini, “Moving beyond 'Refugeeness': Problematising the 'Refugee Community Organisation’” (working paper, Third Sector Research Centre, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, 2012).

## 1.2 The Role(s) of CBOs for Refugees & Migrants

### 1.2.1 CBOs – Networking, Social Capital & the Question of Integration

When refugees from African societies leave their homes to flee war and conflict, they often also leave behind close-bonded societal and family-based structures. Escape from home often creates a “sense of loss”<sup>22</sup> – loss of home, family, protection, familiar social structures, land and property. In their country of asylum, refugees find themselves in unfamiliar surroundings. They, therefore, usually depend on social networks from people of the same national or ethnic origin or people from other origins but sharing the same fate of ‘refugeeness’ in order to cope with displacement and survive in their new environment. Social networks usually provide sources of support to adapt to new and unfamiliar conditions and to sustain livelihoods, be it to develop viable coping strategies, to access institutional services as well as material and moral support, to share information or to tap into employment networks.<sup>23</sup>

Networks may take many forms, ranging from informal loose connections to more formalized and organized forms. They can be based on various foundations such as family, kinship, nationality, religion, and gender.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, it is now well established that networks are often not limited to one geographical location, but can stretch across national

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<sup>22</sup>Grabska, “Marginalization in Urban Spaces,” 190.

<sup>23</sup>Grabska, “Who Asked Them Anyways?”; Hopkins, “Somali Community Organizations;” Marc Sommers, “Young, Male and Pentecostal: Urban Refugees in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 14, no.4 (2001); Roger Zetter and Martyn Pearl, “The Minority within the Minority: Refugee Community-based Organisations in the UK and the Impact of Restrictionism,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 26, no. 4 (2000).

<sup>24</sup>Géraldine Chatelard, “Constructing and Deconstructing “the Iraqi Refugee Crisis” (working paper no. 94, New Issues in Refugee Research, UNHCR, Geneva, 2008); Emilie K. B Minnick, “Between Return and Resettlement: The Formation of Iraqi Refugee ‘Communities’ in Cairo and Amman” (M.A. thesis, American University in Cairo, AUC, 2010); Al-Sharmani, “Refugees and citizens;” Marc Sommers, “Young, Male and Pentecostal;” Sebnem Koser Akcapar, “Re-Thinking Migrants’ Networks and Social Capital: A Case Study of Iranians in Turkey,” *International Migration* 48, no. 2 (2010), 181; Roos Willems, “Coping with Displacement: Social Networking among Refugees,” in *Displacement Risks in Africa: Refugees, Resettlers and their Host Populations*, eds. Itaru Ohta and Yntiso D. Gebre (Australia: Transnational Pacific Press, 2005).

borders and continents in the form of migratory networks or diasporic communities.<sup>25</sup> Al Sharmani and Grabska, for instance, highlight “the constant interplay of the local and translocal” in the livelihood generation of Sudanese and Somali refugees in Cairo.<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, such networks cannot only be positive, but also engender tensions between, or negative consequences for, those situated within them.<sup>27</sup>

CBOs can be understood as constituting one form of networking. De Tona and Lentin actually refrain from using the term ‘association’ (and the same arguably equally applies to the term organization) and rather talk in terms of ‘networks’ when looking at practices of female migrant associations in Ireland. They justify this conceptual orientation on the grounds that “groups function in networks” and that the association they studied were “often positioned between informal networks (understood as fluid and everyday practices of connectivity) and more structural formal organisations that advocate for migrant groups.”<sup>28</sup> CBOs are arguably more institutionalized than everyday practices of networking in that they usually comprise the establishment of a common space, but can be less structured and formalized than other organizations, such as NGOs.

Closely linked to the concept of network is social capital. Social capital is usually regarded as a product of social organization and social networking connections, being measured on the basis of its function to integrate people into given socio-political and socio-economic systems. The concept of social capital was mainly popularized by Putnam and Bourdieu. Putnam distinguished between three forms of social capital. He referred to

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<sup>25</sup> Al-Sharmani, “Transnational Somali Families;” Al-Sharmani and Grabska, “African Refugees and Diasporic Struggles;” Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen, *Migration, Diasporas and Transnationalism* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 1999).

<sup>26</sup> Al-Sharmani and Grabska, “African Refugees and Diasporic Struggles,” 464. I will come back to the concept of diaspora in Section 1.2.2.

<sup>27</sup> Mulki Al Sharmani, “Living Transnationally: Somali Diasporic Women in Cairo,” *International Migration* 44, no. 1, (2006); Al-Sharmani, “Transnational Somali Families;” Koser Akcapar, “Re-Thinking Migrants’ Networks.”

<sup>28</sup> Carla De Tona and Ronit Lentin, “Building a Platform for our Voices to be Heard’: Migrant Women’s Networks as Locations of Transformation in the Republic of Ireland,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 37, no. 3 (2011): 486.

‘bonding capital’ as the linkages within and between homogenous groups’, to ‘bridging capital’ as the connections of otherwise diverse groups through a common interest, and ‘linking capital’ as the establishment of links between groups of different power strata.<sup>29</sup> While for Putnam the accumulation of social capital promotes integration, Bourdieu understands social capital to be mediated through conflict. Accordingly, peoples’ social capital increases their ability to advance their interests, but is determined by their relationship to power legitimized through what he calls ‘symbolic capital.’<sup>30</sup> The existence of social capital, or social connections, in turn, is a determining factor in the availability of more tangible resources such as the provision of basic services.

CBOs or associations are often understood as providing refugees and migrants with social capital, in terms of ‘bonding capital’ with people from the same ethnic group, ‘bridging capital’ with people of other ethnic groups, and ‘linking capital’ with institutions, NGOs or other civil society groups.<sup>31</sup> Attributes that are, thereby, linked to CBOs as sources of social capital are their role in facilitating adaptation to the host culture, norms and environment, reconstructing cohesion and a sense of identity, and mediating between refugee communities and host society.<sup>32</sup>

Social capital can, however, mean different things in different contexts. Fuglerud and Engebrigsten criticize current conceptualizations of social capital for neglecting the wider context of migrating populations and for failing to neither account for varied experiences among different immigrant groups nor for the possibility of change of cultural practices.

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<sup>29</sup>Robert D. Putnam, “The Prosperous Community: Social Capital and Public Life,” *American Prospect* 13 (1993).

<sup>30</sup>Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*.

<sup>31</sup>Laura Morales and Katia Pilati, “The Role of Social Capital in Migrants’ Engagement in Local Politics in European Cities,” in *Social Capital, Political Participation and Migration in Europe: Making Multicultural Democracy Work?*, ed. Laura Morales and Marco Giugni (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 96, 106; Jean Tillie, “Social Capital of Organisations and their Members: Explaining the Political Integration of Immigrants in Amsterdam,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 30, no. 3 (2004), 531; Roger Zetter, David Griffiths, and Nando Signona, “Social Capital or Social Exclusion? The Impact of Asylum-Seeker Dispersal on UK Refugee Community Organizations,” *Community Development Journal* 40, no. 2 (2005): 175.

<sup>32</sup>Zetter, Griffiths, and Signona, “Social Capital or Social Exclusion,” 170.



Thus, instead of just evaluating successful integration and the development of effective social capital according to the values and parameters of the host country (e.g. upward social mobility), one should look at the particular conditions and networking behaviors of different immigrant and refugee groups and try to understand the “cultural grammars underlying the purposes for which minorities themselves put social capital to use.”<sup>33</sup> Hence, social capital can mean different things to different actors and, thus, can be developed differently. Moreover, social capital in terms of networking can also have negative effects. Koser Akcapar, for instance, reports how Iranian asylum seekers in Turkey were advised by other Iranians to make false statements at the UNHCR, leading to the closing of their files.<sup>34</sup>

Many questions remain when it comes to viewing CBOs in the framework of social capital. What forms of social capital do refugees and migrants, for instance, see as vital at the individual level and what kinds of social capital are mobilized by CBOs (e.g. fostering inward community cohesion or seeking outward connections with other groups)? To what extent do state laws and policies promote or hamper individuals’ and CBOs’ ability to establish certain forms of social capital (e.g. linking capital to social institutions or bridging capital with civil society groups)?

CBOs are often assumed to have positive integrative functions.<sup>35</sup> Harrell-Bond provides a simple definition of integration as “a situation in which host and refugee communities are able to co-exist, sharing the same resources – both economic and social – with no greater mutual conflict than that which exists within the host community.”<sup>36</sup> Against the backdrop of many existing protracted refugee situations, which provide little chances for

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<sup>33</sup>Oivind Fuglerud and Ada Engebriksen, “Culture, Networks and Social Capital: Tamil and Somali Immigrants in Norway,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 29, no. 6 (2006): 1131.

<sup>34</sup>Koser Akcapar, “Re-Thinking Migrants’ Networks.”

<sup>35</sup>David Griffiths, Nando Sigona, and Roger Zetter, *Refugee Community Organisations and Dispersal: Networks, Resources and Social Capital*. Bristol, UK: Policy Press, 2005; Zetter, Griffiths, and Sigona, “Social Capital or Social Exclusion,” 169.

<sup>36</sup>Barbara .E. Harrell-Bond, *Imposing Aid: Emergency Assistance to Refugees* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 7.

possible voluntary repatriation in the near future as well as limited options for resettlement, refugees' local integration seems to be the logical option to pursue for humanitarian actors.

However, one has to acknowledge that integration is not a unitary concept but dependent on how it is conceptualized by different actors, according to which variables (social, cultural, political economic) it is measured, under which motifs specific variables are used, and who determines both variables and their measurement. Host state and society, refugees and humanitarian actors might have different perceptions and opinions about integration and whether it is even desirable. These cannot only shape policies and behaviors of actors in different ways, but also conflict with each other. For instance, host states' and societies' attitudes and policies towards integration (e.g. assimilation, multiculturalism, incorporation, exclusion) can inform the way refugees and migrants are perceived and treated, and which political, economic and social rights are made available to them. The degree of societal, political and socio-economic inclusion or exclusion can, in turn, induce the latter's opportunities and preferences to resort to certain forms of social support (e.g. networks with co-nationals versus with host society).

Another question is what role refugee- and migrant-led CBO can take in integrative processes, not only with regards to their own ideas and efforts, but also concerning external actors' views and opinions with regards to their possible instrumentalization or negligence. CBOs' ethnic focus can, for example, hamper integration of their members into their host society. Morales and Pilati found that while ethnic advocacy organizations in European cities are capable of mobilizing migrants' interest in the politics of their country of residence, bonding at the ethnic-associational level can equally reduce individuals' inclination to become interested or active in the political affairs of their country of residence. Hence, if integration is understood in terms of foreigners' participation in a host country's politics, CBOs are not necessarily driving forces for such political inclusion. Furthermore,

Griffiths, Sigona and Zetter conclude in the case of refugee-initiated CBOs in Great Britain that structural inefficiencies, lack of financial means, fragmentation within refugee communities and the effects of governmental policies can impede the development of CBOs as hubs for integrative processes. Overall, it has to be taken into account what kind of integration is pursued by different actors, including the state and CBOs, for whom integration actually matters, and what conditions – financial, legal or otherwise – might foster or hinder integrative processes.

### *1.2.2 CBOs as Places of Identity Construction & Community Building*

According to Hopkins, CBOs are often “established around minority groups, ethnicity or countries of origin.”<sup>37</sup> CBOs have usually be identified by scholars, and are regarded by states and service providers, to be places that enhance cohesion among its members, keep alive cultural practices and tradition, and help maintain links to the homeland. However, when taking a closer look at community formations, one arrives at a more varied and complex picture.

Factors that are usually presumed to form the basis of community are diverse including religion, class, ethnicity, kinship, common country or city of origin, a sense of belonging and collective identity, organizational power, politics, leadership and self-organized structures.<sup>38</sup> Common experience of flight and exile and the production of the histories of such experiences can equally pave the way for community building. In exile, for instance, the sharing of livelihood strategies, often including the pooling of material resources or information, has been revealed to be common manifestations of community formation

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<sup>37</sup>Hopkins, “Somali Community Organizations,” 361.

<sup>38</sup>Karen Jacobsen, “Refugees in Urban Areas”; Marianne Turner and Farida Tilbury Fozdar, “Negotiating ‘Community’ in Educational Settings: Adult South Sudanese Students in Australia,” *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 31, no. 4 (2010).

among refugees.<sup>39</sup> Turner and Fozdar describe communities as “simultaneously reflecting material and ideational interests . . . and an emotional craving for connection with others.”<sup>40</sup> A more conventional understanding of community is to think of it in geographical terms as a place.<sup>41</sup> On a normative level, community can be understood “as the collective interests, values, and norms that organize activities and interactions.”<sup>42</sup> People from the same community share a common history, culture and maybe even ideology, a “shared notion of togetherness”<sup>43</sup> binding them together. Hence, common interests and characteristics – material, ideological, emotional or otherwise – can form the glue of community formation. Even people without prior personal histories or shared characteristics might form bonds when “finding themselves thrown together by their circumstances”<sup>44</sup> as well.

Identity construction is seen to be a strong marker of community formation. Experiences of flight and exile have characterized the analysis of refugees’ community building which is often explored through the lenses of ethnicity and the Somali equivalent of clanship.<sup>45</sup> Al-Sharmani and Grabska, for instance, show how clan, in the case of Somalis, and ethnicity, in the case of Sudanese, become relevant for refugees in Cairo when seeking financial aid and housing. Nonetheless, the authors highlight that in the case of Somalis “clanism has never been the sole factor of formation of communities (and refugee associations).”<sup>46</sup> Rather, understandings of identity and community are multilayered. They can be informed not only by clan, but also by length of residence, residential areas within the city,

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<sup>39</sup>Mulki Al-Sharmani, “Refugees and Citizens,” 25; Laura Hammond, *This Place Will Become Home: Refugee Repatriation to Ethiopia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 15.

<sup>40</sup>Turner and Fozdar, “‘Community’ in Educational Settings,” 365.

<sup>41</sup>Nancy Farewell and Jamie B. Cole, “Community as a Context of Healing: Psychosocial Recovery of Children Affected by War and Political Violence,” *International Journal of Mental Health* 30, no. 4 (2001-2002): 24.

<sup>42</sup>Jean L. Athey and Frederick L. Ahearn, Jr., “The Mental Health of Refugee Children: An Overview,” in *Refugee Children: Theory, Research, and Services*, eds. Frederick L. Ahearn and Jean L. Athey Jr. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 13.

<sup>43</sup>Farewell and Cole, “Community as Healing,” 24.

<sup>44</sup>Hammond, *This Place Will Become Home*, 11.

<sup>45</sup>David. J. Griffiths, *Somali and Kurdish Refugees in London: New Identities in the Diaspora* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 20-25.

<sup>46</sup>Al-Sharmani and Grabska, “African Refugees and Diasporic Struggles,” 480.

feelings of friendship and solidarity established in previous host societies, and the construction of a collective identity of *soomaalinimo* articulated through community work and mutual support.<sup>47</sup>

Another relevant aspect for community formation is the notion of diaspora, especially in the case of Somalis who have spread all over the world in the course of over twenty years, thereby having established close linkages between homeland and numerous countries of asylum and resettlement. For Griffiths, the concept of diaspora acts as an “organising concept, encompassing attachments to home, forms of flight and resettlement and processes of identity formation in the country of exile.”<sup>48</sup> Al-Sharmani understands diasporic life as a fusion of personal experiencing and transnational networking through communication, economic exchange and other practices between people in the country of origin and their relatives and co-nationals in exile.<sup>49</sup>

Refugee- and migrant-led CBOs might be constructed on the basis of different markers of identity, whether broadly through a common legal status as refugees and migrants, or more narrowly along specific national, religious, political, ethnic or clan lines. However, CBOs can have dividing as well as unifying effects. Sadouni highlights, for example, that Somali CBOs in Johannesburg can constitute spaces that either emphasize pluralism or reinforce notions of clanism.<sup>50</sup> In the reverse, social and structural conditions within groups can both strengthen and weaken the likelihood of strong CBOs. The landscape of Somali community organizations in London and Toronto is, for example, largely fragmented due to clan, gender and generational tensions. By contrast, Turkish Kurds in London managed to consolidate small-scale, nationally-based organizations through a common political identity. On the downside, however, the politicization of Kurdish organizations also led to the

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid.; Al-Sharmani, “Refugees and Citizens,” 84.

<sup>48</sup>Griffiths, *Somali and Kurdish Refugees*, 26.

<sup>49</sup>Mulki Al-Sharmani, “Transnational Somali Families in Cairo,” *Refuge* 24, no. 1 (2007), 97.

<sup>50</sup>Samadia Sadouni, “‘God is not Unemployed’: Journeys of Somali Refugees in Johannesburg,” *African Studies* 68, no. 2 (2009): 240.

exclusion of minorities who did not fully identify with the organizations political agendas.<sup>51</sup> Moro found similar results in the case of Sudanese refugees in Egypt and Uganda whose establishment of tribal groups was founded on the politicization and subsequent polarization of ethnicity resulting from hostilities in their country of origin.<sup>52</sup>

It is not only relevant to explore along which lines CBOs may be constituted or fragmented, but also how place is experienced. Fuglerud and Engebrigsten highlight the “need to understand how the people concerned conceptualize space and their own communities within it.”<sup>53</sup> Similarly, Spicer contends that the way asylum seekers and refugees perceive social exclusion and inclusion is partially dependent on how they perceive the neighborhoods they live in.<sup>54</sup> The concept of ‘emplacement’ can be illuminating in this regard. For Hammond, it describes how people through their practices and commodification transform “an unfamiliar physical space into a personalized, socialized place.”<sup>55</sup>

On the other hand, a certain denominator that defines a place can also alienate people. Several Somali female respondents in Hopkins study among CBOs in London, for example, expressed concerns over lack of trustworthiness and impartiality due to clan tensions as compelling reasons for avoiding organizations run by Somalis. The CBOs were experienced as sites where clan politics dominate and, consequently, were to be avoided. Hence, both the subjective meanings that individuals and groups attach to a place (e.g. as a place of symbolic identity or socialization), but also the ways in which people are constituted and re-constituted within such place (e.g. through the promotion of particular identity politics) need to be taken into consideration.

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<sup>51</sup>Griffiths, *Somali and Kurdish Refugees*; Hopkins, “Somali Community Organizations,” Östen Wahlbeck, “Community Work and Exile Politics: Kurdish Refugee Associations in London,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 11, no. 3 (1998).

<sup>52</sup>Leben Nelson Moro, “Interethnic Relations in Exile: The Politics of Ethnicity among Sudanese Refugees in Uganda and Egypt,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 17, no. 4 (2004).

<sup>53</sup>Fuglerud and Engebrigtsen, “Culture, Networks and Social Capital,” 1126.

<sup>54</sup>Neil Spicer, “Places of Exclusion and Inclusion: Asylum-Seeker and Refugee Experiences of Neighbourhoods in the UK,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 34, no. 3 (2008).

<sup>55</sup>*This Place Will Become Home*, 3.

In sum, factors which determine the fragmentation or consolidation of CBOs are diverse, often overlapping, and arguably highly context-specific. Community formation, and as such also CBOs as one platform for community formation, must arguably be perceived as relevant and meaningful to its members.<sup>56</sup> However, not only internal power relations of identity politics, as mentioned above, but also the influence of external factors may inform the creation and nature of CBOs as well.

### *1.2.3 The Politics of Community Making & Its Discontents*

CBOs are usually seen as important mediators between the state and refugees. They are, thereby, often assumed to act in the interest of the national or ethnic communities they are supposedly representing. A dominant assumption on which such notion of representation is based is that refugees are seen to form homogenous communities and CBOs are, thereby, regarded as representatives of such communities. Such assumptions at both levels are, however, problematic. A negative consequence of the naturalization of the notion of community of refugees is that it imposes “a problematic fictive unity upon group social relations.”<sup>57</sup> The same refugees originating from the same territory are regarded as sharing common “natural roots”<sup>58</sup> and are assumed to “form themselves into a ‘community’”<sup>59</sup> in their country of asylum. Such homogenizing assumptions, however, can obscure “oppressive, divisive and exploitative tendencies characterizing groups of refugees coming from the same country.”<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, linking the representation of refugee communities to CBOs as their representatives generates the impression of powerless refugees in need of appeal, protection and representation. While ethnic- or national-based CBOs might function as representing the

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<sup>56</sup>N. Mark Shelly, “Building Community from ‘Scratch’: Forces at Work among Urban Vietnamese Refugees in Milwaukee,” *Sociological Inquiry* 71, no. 4 (2001): 491.

<sup>57</sup>Piacentini, “Moving beyond ‘Refugeeness’,” 4.

<sup>58</sup>Maya Korac, *Remaking Home. Reconstructing Life, Place and Identity in Rome and Amsterdam* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 31.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, 31.

interest of their members (e.g. in terms of advocacy organizations), they do not necessarily represent ‘all refugees’ of a particular ethnicity or nationality.

The categorization of refugees according to national, ethnic or other lines must, therefore, not necessarily be the result of internal practices of CBOs themselves, but can also be driven by external actors. Hyndman refers to the ‘rhetoric of community’ employed by international humanitarian organizations because of its popularity, acceptability and politically strategic importance in securing funding and consolidating the institutional power of refugee relief organizations.<sup>61</sup> Kelly prefers the concept of ‘contingent community’ to refer to the influence of external actors on organizations. Accordingly, people who form an organization do this to some extent by “conform[ing] to the expectations of the host society in order to gain advantages of a formal community association, while the private face of the group remains unconstituted as a community.”<sup>62</sup> Soysal in her study of incorporation regimes in Europe argues in a similar vein that “the organising principles and incorporation styles of the host polity are crucial variables in accounting for the emerging organisational patterns of migrants.”<sup>63</sup> While in Great Britain and Canada, for instance, the governments’ promotion of interaction with refugees through refugee-based organizations fuelled the growth of CBOs, refugee associations in Germany and Finland are less numerous due to more state-centred models of service provision to refugees.<sup>64</sup>

External structural determinants and institutional actors can have “an instrumental role in promoting particular forms of refugee organisations, based in large part upon unified and readily identifiable refugee communities.”<sup>65</sup> The promotion of CBOs as unifying entities, however, neither necessarily reflects actual social relationships nor does it justice to

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<sup>61</sup>Jennifer Hyndman, “Refugee Self-Management and the Question of Governance,” *Refuge* 16, no. 2 (1997): 16.

<sup>62</sup>Lynnette Kelly, “Bosnian Refugees in Britain: Questioning Community,” *Sociology* 37, no. 1 (2003): 35.

<sup>63</sup>Yasemin Nuhoğlu Soysal, *The Limits of Citizenship: Migrants and Postnational Membership in Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 85-86.

<sup>64</sup>Griffiths, Sigona, and Zetter. *Refugee Community Organizations*; Zetter and Pearl, “Minority within the Minority,” Wahlbeck, “Community Work and Exile.”

<sup>65</sup>Griffiths, Sigona, Zetter, “Integrative Paradigms, Marginal Reality,” 892.



appropriate modes of representation for all refugees or refugee groups. Moreover, the actively promoted or perceived role of CBOs as buttresses of representation of marginalized groups like refugees does not only run the risk of excluding those who are not reached by, or actively disassociate themselves from, CBOs. It also runs the risk of ignoring internal power hierarchies and frictions both within CBOs and refugee populations at large. The perception of CBOs as unified representatives of unified refugee communities can arguably also be geared at exerting social control, whether by state powers or by refugees themselves who are perceived by the state or refugee service providers to act on behalf of homogenous groups.

### **1.3 Locating Individual and Collective Agency**

Apart from examining how CBOs evolve as part of community organizing and what motivations and mechanisms underlie their establishment and functioning, it is of interest to look at *who* is behind such organizing both as an individual and as a collective. While the discussion on the factors that surround the establishment of CBOs (e.g. service provision, advocacy, cultural practices) implicitly indicate some motivations, this sections deals more in detail with the concept of agency to understand why individuals and groups become active. Thereby, one has to take into consideration the performance of certain categories (e.g. as refugee or migrant). Moreover, it is not only illuminating to look at how and why individuals involved in CBOs able to exert agency, but also to examine CBOs as a whole as manifestations of collective agency. At both levels, agents' relation to authority and structural power relations as well as issues of representations can influence and possibly distort people's and organization's ability to exert agency.

The concept of agency is as diffuse and contested as the concept of community, paving the way for various interpretations and conceptions. Within the field of social cognitive theory, Bandura, distinguishes between three forms of agency: (1) personal agency

of the individual; (2) proxy agency of people who, lacking direct control over their situation, try to get other with more power or expertise to act on their behalf; and (3) collective agency which recognizes that individuals' lives are far from autonomous, but in many ways interdependent, requiring people to "work together to secure what they cannot accomplish on their own."<sup>66</sup>

Kabeer delineates agency as the "ability to define one's goals and to act upon them."<sup>67</sup> Capabilities are, thereby, not only determined by agency, but also by the availability of resources.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, agency itself does not only constitute an action itself, but equally "encompasses the meaning, motivation and purpose which individuals bring to their activity, their *sense* of agency, or the 'power within.'"<sup>69</sup> This resonates with Bandura's standpoint that people's perception of their personal efficacy shapes various factors of human agency such as goals, aspirations, expectations as well as perceptions about impediments and opportunities.<sup>70</sup> In other words, people's belief in their own ability to shape events can be highly influential.

However, a person cannot be uncoupled from its environment. In cultural and feminist studies, anthropology and poststructuralist theories, agency has become defined in relation to structure, power, authority complicating the investigation and interpretation of how agency functions. As Somers explains, agency takes place within a complex interplay between resistance and the power exercised by the state and its institutions.<sup>71</sup> Herndl and Licona press for looking at agency not as "an attribute of the individual, but the conjunction of a set of

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<sup>66</sup>Albert Bandura, "Exercise of Human Agency Through Collective Efficacy" *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 9, no. 3 (2000): 75.

<sup>67</sup>Naila Kabeer, "Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment," *Development and Change* 30 (1999): 438.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.* (italics in the original).

<sup>70</sup>Bandura, "Exercise of Human Agency," 75.

<sup>71</sup>Margaret R. Somers, "The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach," *Theory and Society* 23, no. 5 (1994): 634.

social and subjective relations that constitute the possibility of action.”<sup>72</sup> Thus, acting in a certain way is not merely a matter of individual choice, but can be framed by various cultural and social norms as well as political and other structural forces and conditions.

Poststructuralist theories have deconstructed the subject as an actor, having laid bare “the historicity and social embeddedness of its very constitution.”<sup>73</sup> Bourdieu relates to structures of power as influencing in part the position of agents in a social space.<sup>74</sup> Foucault has a similar understanding of power as both being made up of fixed and relational elements, but stresses power to be an embodied practice rather than something static. Power, so Foucault, does not exist in itself, but only “when it is put into action.”<sup>75</sup> Hence, power is a set or structure of actions “exercised by some on others . . . even though, of course, it is inscribed in a field of sparse available possibilities underpinned by permanent structures.”<sup>76</sup> Differential power relations are, thereby, brought into being by different means (such as violence, speech acts, control and surveillance) and determined by institutions (e.g. traditions, legal systems) and the rationalization of processes.<sup>77</sup>

A dilemma in the discourse of the postmodern subject is to what extent she can take purposeful action. For Foucault, the exercise of power through actions on others foregrounds the field of possible further actions.<sup>78</sup> Agency outside of such power structures seems, thereby, to be almost eliminated. Butler builds on Foucault, but leaves room for agency, although the subject neither has an existence prior to its acts nor are its acts independent from the conditions within which a subject finds itself. As she argues, “at the most intimate levels,

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<sup>72</sup>Carl G. Herndl and Adela C. Licona. “Shifting Agency: Agency, Kairos, and the Possibilities of Social Action.” *Communicative Practices in Workplaces and the Professions: Cultural Perspectives on the Regulation of Discourse and Organizations* (2007), 133.

<sup>73</sup>Zeynep Gambetti, “The Agent Is the Void! From the Subjected Subject to the Subject of Action,” *Rethinking Marxism: A Journal of Economics, Culture & Society* 17, no. 3 (2005), 427.

<sup>74</sup>Pierre Bourdieu, “The Social Space and Genesis of Groups,” *Theory and Society* 14 (1985): 724.

<sup>75</sup>Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (1982): 788.

<sup>76</sup>Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” in *Michel Foucault, Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, eds. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 340.

<sup>77</sup>Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (1982): 792.

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*, 791.

we are social; we are . . . constituted in cultural norms that precede and exceed us, given over to a set of cultural norms and a field of power that condition us fundamentally.<sup>79</sup> A subject's identity is constituted through structural powers as well as the existence of categories such as sex, gender, race, ethnicity, and class whereby the constant reiteration of such categories upholds such institutions and structures.<sup>80</sup> Resistance is, however, possible through what she calls 'subjectivation' and 'subversion.' Accordingly, the existence of larger oppressive structures also opens space for 'subversion.' As Butler's explains, "[t]he subject might yet be thought as deriving its agency from precisely the power it opposes."<sup>81</sup> Consequently, Butler's subjects are capable of agency, "albeit a radically conditioned agency, in which they can reflexively and critically examine their conditions of possibility and in which they can both subvert and eclipse the powers that act on them and which they enact."<sup>82</sup>

Ortner criticizes radical position of what she calls "anti-subject or anti-agent poststructuralism."<sup>83</sup> While not rejecting the argument that agency, which she defines "minimally as a sense that the self is an authorized social being,"<sup>84</sup> is culturally constructed and organized, she rejects the totalization of structure as the determining factor of agency. With regards to female agency, she notes that "whatever the hegemonic order of gender relations may be . . . [t]here are always sites . . . of alternative practices and perspectives available, and these may become the bases of resistance and transformation."<sup>85</sup> Papadopoulos,

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<sup>79</sup>Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), 45.

<sup>80</sup>Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press., 1997), 2; Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 147.

<sup>81</sup>Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 17.

<sup>82</sup>Bronwyn Davies, "Subjectification: The Relevance of Butler's Analysis for Education," *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 27, no. 4 (2006): 426.

<sup>83</sup>Sherry B. Ortner, *Making Gender. The Politics and Erotics of Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 7.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*, 18. MacLeod provides an illustrative example that exemplifies the interplay between individual agency and normative structures. In her exploration of veiling practices among lower-middle class workers in Cairo showed how a collective sense of identity as well as socio-cultural norms towards, and institutions of, marriage, family, employment etc. can influence agency. She reveals the nuanced boundaries between agency and compliance at the example of the practice of veiling of Muslim working women. On the one hand, she argues, this act is a sign of domesticity to dominant values. On the other hand, the step of going out to work shows an accommodation of protesting against economic insecurity (Alene Elowe MacLeod, "Hegemonic Relations and

Stephenson and Tsianos argue that states' attempt to control deviant or undesired groups is actually a *response to* these groups' escape from control not the other way around.<sup>86</sup> The debate evolves, hence, not around *if*, but *to what extent* power and structure shape an agent and his or her agency and to what extent agency by the resisting impacts on structures and power.

As discussed in the Foreword of this thesis, certain categories or labels, such as that of the refugee, can not only circumscribe the scope of agency of those on whom they are imposed, but also influence their behavior and even identity. As Zetter argues, "refugees inhabit an institutionalized world of NGOs, intergovernmental agencies and governments."<sup>87</sup> The management of refugees through bureaucratic procedures can socialize refugees with certain identities and engender various structural effects (e.g. control, regulation, opportunities).<sup>88</sup> Iskander Wahba, for instance, demonstrates how refugee women in Cairo must perform and embody particular kinds of sexual vulnerabilities – both as woman and as refugees – to to be deemed victims and eligible for assistance. In this process, their "subjectivities are constructed and imposed by UNHCR, the international community, and by refugee advocates."<sup>89</sup>

This does, however, not mean that refugees are powerless victims without any agency. Iskander Wahba equally describes how refugee women can perform certain images or categories of the vulnerable female refugee in order to facilitate their access to assistance.<sup>90</sup> Similarly, Sassen shows how through daily practices within the bounds of the state, undocumented immigrants create new forms of citizenship, destabilizing previously

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Gender Resistance: The New Veiling as Accommodating Protest in Cairo," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 17, no. 3 (1992).)

<sup>86</sup>Dimitri Papadopoulos, Niamh Stephenson, and Vassilis Tsianos, *Escape Routes: Control and Subversion in the Twenty-first Century* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 43.

<sup>87</sup>Zetter, 'Labelling Refugees,' 40-41.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>89</sup>Mariham Iskander Wahba, "The State of Statelessness: Justice, Violence, Subjectivity, and Urban Asylum Seeking and Refugee Women in Cairo" (Master thesis, American University in Cairo, 2010), 25, 126.

<sup>90</sup>Isanker Wahba, "The State of Statelessness," 29, 126.

fixed notions of citizenship as a mere legal status. By engaging in the same practices as citizens, long-term undocumented immigrants, hence, can make claims to the space in which they reside.<sup>91</sup> Thus, neither is the creation of categories a unilateral process nor do limited rights and restrictive conditions that come with certain categorizations mean a denial of any kind of agency of the category-holder. Still, as the case of refugee women in Cairo shows, refugees are often set in a certain position within structures of power that dictate their behaviors. It is, for instance, questionable whether refugee women would voluntarily enact the image of the vulnerable victim if they did not have to in order to be able to make claims to justice and assistance.

Agency is not only enacted within particular social contexts of power structures and relations, but also influenced by authority. Like agency, authority must be analyzed within contextualized structures and practices within which it is (re-)produced. It often defines peoples' capacity and opportunities to function as agents.<sup>92</sup> Power structures can, thereby, equip some with authority over others.<sup>93</sup> In the Foucauldian sense, authority regulates who can speak and what is actually regarded as legitimate to speak about.<sup>94</sup> According to Bourdieu's explication of language, people's language can attain 'symbolic power' when they are able to express themselves in a convincing way. Authority "implies legitimacy that validates one's right and ability to speak and act in a certain context."<sup>95</sup> However, authority does not only legitimize to speak or act, but needs to be legitimized as well. Bourdieu stresses that a certain language must be recognized by others as superior over other forms of

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<sup>91</sup>Saskia Sassen, "The Repositioning of Citizenship and Alienage: Emergent Subjects and Spaces for Politics," in *Displacement, Asylum, Migration: the Oxford Amnesty Lectures 2004*, ed. Kate E. Tunstall (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006), 178.

<sup>92</sup>Herndl and Licona, "Shifting Agency," 20.

<sup>93</sup>*Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>94</sup>Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972).

<sup>95</sup>Herndl and Licona, "Shifting Agency," 3.

speech.<sup>96</sup>In other words, authority cannot occur in a vacuum. Moreover, Butler reminds us that “it is clearly possible to speak with authority *without* being authorized to speak.”<sup>97</sup>

Not only the social context, but also the physicality of space can play a role with regards to agency. Zibechi, who looked at rural and urban collective activism of marginalized people in Latin America outside the parameters of the state, state-controlled trade unions and leftist parties, suggests that forms of collective organizing are tied to territory or the physical space. However, in the act of resistance against control these people equally create and re-appropriate space. Resisting groups “are opening up their own spaces in a process of struggle in which they develop as subjects: spaces created, designed and controlled by these very sectors themselves.”<sup>98</sup> This outlook does not start from the negative, state-centered viewpoint of state control, but adopts “another way of looking which starts with the differences that they [the resisting] have created in order then to visualize other possible paths.”<sup>99</sup>

Resistance does not need to be the only driving motivation for people to exert agency. Hafez suggests the concept of ‘self-care’ when looking at women’s leaders in Cairo’s mosque movement.<sup>100</sup> Similarly, Mahmood has generated the concept of the ‘docile agent’ when examining Muslim women’s practice of their religion. For both authors, agency is not expressed through resistance, but through a cultivation of the self, involving the endorsement of cultural and religious norms and the submission to personal ideals.<sup>101</sup>Moreover, Tomlinson, who conducted research among refugee women engaged in volunteer work, observed that some refugees saw volunteering as a way of ‘giving back,’ of ‘helping others.’ However, she does not only interpret the women’s volunteer work as an act of altruism, but

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<sup>96</sup>Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*.

<sup>97</sup>Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 157 (italics in original).

<sup>98</sup>Raúl Zibechi, “Subterranean Echos: Resistance and Politics “Desde el Sótano,” *Socialism and Democracy* 19, no.3 ( 2005): 18.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid.

<sup>100</sup>Sherine Hafez, “The Terms of Empowerment: Islamic Women Activists in Egypt,” *Cairo Papers in Social Science* 24, no. 4 (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2003).

<sup>101</sup>Saba Mahmood, “Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival,” *Cultural Anthropology* 16, no. 2 (2001).

equally as an expression of resistance against the parasitic images of refugees, and as an opportunity to find employment.<sup>102</sup> Her account demonstrates that motivations for acting in a certain way can be multiple and overlapping. The various examples, moreover show, that while agency is highly contextual, it must also be seen as “rooted in . . . subjective understandings and experiences.”<sup>103</sup>

## 1.4 Conclusion

The conceptualization of CBOs within various theoretical approaches – such as networking, social capital, integration, community, and identity construction – as well as individual and collective agency bring to the fore the complexities and predicaments in exploring refugee-led CBOs, their internal dynamics and their positions within wider policy and service structures. Any discussion of CBOs as expressions of collective agency, and individuals as agents within them, cannot be disconnected from complex issues of representation, structure, power and authority. The forms in which CBOs reveal themselves can be informed by endogenous and exogenous factors and conditions. Structures and power relations outside of CBOs can, thereby, as much influence CBOs’ role in community formation, identity construction, integration, social capital formation and promotion of individual and collective agency as can CBOs’ composition and internal structures themselves.

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<sup>102</sup>Frances Tomlinson, "Marking Difference and Negotiating Belonging: Refugee Women, Volunteering and Employment." *Gender, Work & Organization* 17, no. 3 (2010): 280, 284.

<sup>103</sup>De Tona and Moreo, "Theorizing Migrant-Led Activism," 23.



## Chapter 2: Methodology & Research Process

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My interest in exploring refugee-initiated projects took roots during my participation as a research assistant in a project on urban refugee livelihoods in 2011-2012. Then it evolved during my work as a psychosocial worker for unaccompanied minors at the Cairo-based organization ‘Africa and Middles East Refugee Assistance’ (AMERA) in 2012-2013 during which I was also involved in a community mobilization project with the Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi. My special concern laid in the question how – amidst limited services and generally poor living conditions – programs could be developed that support refugees to be more independent in fending for themselves. Getting in contact with several CBOs opened my eyes that refugees and migrants were already very active in creating initiatives on their own and that a myriad of CBOs existed in Cairo. These CBOs sparked my curiosity of how they functioned and what meanings they had for the people to whom they were reaching out. Over time, it became the stepping stone for my research.

I am well aware that writing about people can be a – in Law’s words – a “messy”<sup>104</sup> undertaking. The ways I see and hear, and finally interpret, things are certainly shaped by the theories I employ as well as my own culture and ideas. Ramazanoğlu and Holland stress that a researcher cannot renounce the fact that her research experience is inseparable from the rest of her life, background and identity.<sup>105</sup> Moreover, it would be false to assume that my writing echoes one reality. Law regards different realities to overlap and interfere with one another, their relations being complex and messy. Methods, thereby, “participate in the enactment of realities,”<sup>106</sup> In other words: Social realities are never fully comprehensible or conveyable and the means by which we try to explore such realities influences not the ways we see them,

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<sup>104</sup>John Law, *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research* (London: Routledge, 2007), 143.

<sup>105</sup>Caroline Ramazanoğlu and Janet Holland, *Feminist Methodology: Challenges and Choices* (London: Thousand Oaks; California: Sage, 2002).

<sup>106</sup>Law, *After Method*, 45.

but also what kind of realities we recognize. Moreover, Trinh argues that any kind of writing is fiction and that “an analysis of the other-not-me . . . does not occur without the intervention of the me.”<sup>107</sup> This makes it impossible to deliver an object’s “presence, reproducing it *as it is* in its truth, reality, and otherness . . . . [as] no writing can escape interpretation and ethnocentrism.”<sup>108</sup> In other words, the written-up research is not a reflection of realities, but a product of a creative process. Its constructedness does not only derive from my own position as a researcher, but is also shaped by the perceptions and agendas of those I observe and interview. When talking to me, some research participants certainly did so with the interest to influence my views and to convey a certain message to me. Thus, writing is a “representation and presentation of a story of a story of a story.”<sup>109</sup> Thereby, “individuals, including scholars, actively construct and constrain – rather than passively receive – interpretations that are both socially mediated and intertextually situated within a bounded universe of discourse.”<sup>110</sup>

## **2.1 Research Process & Profile of Research Participants**

In retrospect, I can describe my research process as a roller coaster of emotions; perceived tensions and moments of bonding with research participants; feelings of insecurity and joy, of personal successes and failings. It revealed to me the challenges of conducting research and that one has to be highly flexible to improvise and re-orient one’s research process. Such necessary flexibility did not only concern my research within the CBOs themselves, but also encompassed the wider political environment of Cairo, marked by curfews, demonstrations, and unrest. Moreover, personal circumstances can weigh heavily on one’s emotional state of being which, in turn, may impact on one’s performance as a researcher.

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<sup>107</sup>Trinh, *Woman, Native, Other*, 70.

<sup>108</sup>*Ibid.*, 70-71.

<sup>109</sup>David William Cohen, *The Combining of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994), 21.

<sup>110</sup>Laura M. Ahearn, “Language and Agency,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30 (2001), 112.

I did the bulk of my research from late August to December 2013 and conducted some further interviews in February and March 2014. I gained access to both CBOs by approaching the CBO leaders with whom I sought informed consent first. At the center in Maadi, I met with CBO leaders and members at a meeting and explained my research in mid-September 2013. In my absence, they, then, discussed my request to write about them and finally gave me the green light. I approached CBO leaders by myself and gained access to CBO members either by being introduced through a CBO leader or by addressing them myself. At SAFWAC, I presented my research to all SAFWAC leaders on a meeting in October 2013. In a second step, the SAFWAC leaders informed students about my role. While I could freely approach CBO leaders to ask them for participation, the President of the CBO claimed her role as a gatekeeper to connect me to CBO members.

I used a triangulation of qualitative research methods in order to increase my research's validity and to receive information from multiple perspectives. I conducted semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with CBO leaders and members. The interviews lasted from about thirty minutes to up to three hours (mainly with CBO leaders). The focus group discussions ranged from thirty minutes to about two hours. Interviews and focus groups were either conducted in English or with the help a Somali research assistant.

In total, I talked to thirty-three Somalis involved in the CBOs. At SAFWAC, eight CBO leaders and eleven CBO members took part in my research. At the Somali center in Maadi, I talked to five CBO leaders and nine CBO members (see Appendix A). The sample is comprised of eight male and twenty-five female. While most of my research participants were in their late teens or early twenties, the age of some others ranged between late twenties to early forties. In addition to interviews and focus groups, I spent numerous days in both CBOs, teaching English, participating in classes or just hanging out. This gave me the

opportunity to conduct many hours of participant observation and to interact with CBO leaders and members.

In March 2014, I convened meetings with both CBOs, during which I presented my key research findings and asked for feedback. In Maadi, I presented some of my key findings to ten CBO leaders and members. They were generally accepting what I said and did not issue any criticism. At SAFWAC, the meeting was of a complete different nature. Unfortunately, only one CBO member out of eight attendees was present. My presentation was, however, of great value as it turned into a two hours discussion in which the CBO leaders critically questioned my findings and interpretations.

In addition to my research in both CBOs, I conducted interviews with staff of service providers and with other Somali community leaders outside the CBO: (1) two Somali men in Ard el-Liwa who were elected representatives of Somalis in Giza and who had been running a CBO in that neighborhood in the past; (2) three CBO leaders of the CBO ‘Egyptian-Somali for Development’ in Nasr City; (3) the Somali Community Outreach Officer of AMERA; (4) Head of Tadamon; and (5) the current Senior Community Service Assistant and the former Assistant Community Service Officer (since 2013 Assistant Public Health Officer) of the UNHCR Cairo office.

## **2.2 Positionality**

As I had been working with both CBOs through my position at AMERA, I was worried about how I would be perceived. Due to my prior work at AMERA, I put much effort into trying to clarify that I was not a representative of AMERA. Still, at times I found myself in a balancing act between being a researcher and being someone who tries to help where she can. I remember one situation all too well in which one woman I interviewed asked me to help her with finding work and helping her with her sick niece. I would have liked to just give her

some money, but I resisted the temptation as I did not want to create a cascade of expectations among other research participants. Some other CBO members (not leaders) asked me how they would benefit from participating in the research. Therefore, I was anxious to avoid raising expectations and to clearly explain my research and its possible and impossible impacts.

Having worked, studied and researched in Cairo for two years prior to the start of my research was surely an advantage as I was personally familiar with the urban refugee context of Cairo. However, I cannot ignore my own history and positionality as a researcher from a white, Western, middle-class background which arguably inform the selection of problems, the design of the research and the way of data gathering and analysis. On the one hand, it implies that I have to understand my position as an outsider in relation to the community I try to explore. On the other hand, it requires me to “to self-reflect on what values, attitudes, and agenda”<sup>111</sup> underlie my work. Furthermore, I must acknowledge that my position as a non-Somali also foreclosed some insights to me. At SAFWAC, for instance, many CBO leaders and members would always stress that clan did not play a role at SAFWAC. Though some talked about clan tensions in a general manner, I could not expect Somalis to give me insight into possible clan conflicts. Still, through my work with Somalis at AMERA as well as anecdotes of Somali friends, I know that clan tensions exist sometimes.

## **2.3 Limitations & Delimitations**

Since my methodological approach is qualitative, the research is neither claimed to be representative nor is it aimed at generating statistically representative data. Except for some interviews outside the CBOs, I limited my sample mainly to Somalis directly involved in the CBOs. This, of course, limits the possible viewpoints about the CBOs. Research participants

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<sup>111</sup>De Tona and Moreo, “Theorizing Migrant-Led Activism,” 23.

from within the CBOs did not issue major criticism about CBOs or revealed possible frictions and tensions hidden from my eye. I did not search for interviews with Somalis not involved in either CBO who might have expressed negative opinions to me or evaluated the position of CBOs within the Somali community in a less positive light. However, I once met one Somali who intentionally refrained from interacting with other Somalis and did not seek to be attached to the CBO in her neighborhood due to her negative perceptions about the Somali clan culture.

Secondly, due to the sensitivity of researching among refugees, to avoid concerns of mistrust, and to facilitate refugees' readiness to participate in the research I did not tape record any of the interviews, but only made hand-written notes. As a result of this, I can neither conduct a detailed discourse analysis of the interview contents nor quote interviewees' statements at length.

Thirdly, translation was another concern. Translation of concepts from one language to another as well as the interpretations of concepts across cultures can be difficult and problematic.<sup>112</sup> Some English words and concepts were not easily translatable into Somali word by word and vice versa. It was, therefore, not always easy to ensure the "compatibility of meaning across different languages."<sup>113</sup> However, I explained my theoretical framework with my research assistants. They did an excellent job in explaining English concepts and how they were meant to be understood in the context of my research. If needed, they provided explanations and clarifications through examples in order to make concepts more tangible for my research participants.

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<sup>112</sup>Bogusia Temple and Rosalind Edwards, "Interpreters/Translators and Cross-Language Research: Reflexivity and Border Crossings," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 1, no. 2 (2002).

<sup>113</sup>Judy Singer, "Listening to Refugee Bodies: The Naturopathic Encounter as a Cross-cultural Meeting Place" (PhD diss., Southern Cross University, Lismore, 2008), 76, <http://epubs.scu.edu.au/theses/81/>.

## 2.4 Ethical Considerations

My main concerns throughout my research were ethical aspects. Research with refugees raises numerous ethical dilemmas. Refugees are often vulnerable as a result of their flight experience as well as their legally uncertain and socio-economically oftentimes difficult situation in their country of asylum. This creates many ethical and moral concerns for researchers who work in a context in which key principles of ethical research, such as consent, confidentiality, do no harm, beneficence, and justice are hard to realize.<sup>114</sup> While I did not address sensitive issues with regards to flight, security risks or refugee status determination processes, I saw it as an imperative to minimize any risks and to show respect for the participants. Despite the fact that most research participants allowed me to use their real names, I am mostly using pseudonyms (see Appendix A). I am only using the real names of the CBO leaders at SAFWAC as they specifically requested me to do so with the argument that SAFWAC was a publicly known organization and they did not want me to create a ‘fictional SAFWAC.’ Indeed, SAFWAC appears on the website of Tadamon and the SAFWAC leaders themselves manage an open Facebook page. Their names are hence traceable in the media.

In addition, I ensured that research participants were aware of their rights, the limits of the research as well as possible risks. I used oral consent forms as I regarded it as more applicable, not only in accordance with the traditionally oral Somali culture, but also because I could not expect that everyone was able to read and write. In addition, I gave room for questions before and after interviews and focus groups and offered each participant a copy of the oral consent form. A concern with regards to voluntariness was the facilitating role of

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<sup>114</sup>Richard Hugman, Linda Bartolomei, and Eileen Pittaway, “Human Agency and the Meaning of Informed Consent: Reflections on Research with Refugees,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 24, no. 4 (2011); Karen Jacobsen and Loren B. Landau, “The Dual Imperative in Refugee Research: Some Methodological and Ethical Considerations in Social Science Research on Forced Migration” (working paper, UNHCR, Geneva, 2003); Catriona Mackenzie, Christopher McDowell, and Eileen Pittaway, “Beyond ‘Do No Harm’: The Challenge of Constructing Ethical Relationships in Refugee Research,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 20, no. 2 (2007).

gatekeepers to approach prospective research participants. While familiar community leaders can promote the trust of refugees, they might just as much feel obliged to participate if addressed by them. There were moments when I felt that some of the CBO leaders were pushing for CBO members to talk to me. When I realized that they felt uncomfortable, I stopped approaching them or ended interviews early.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

After having laid the basis for this thesis through a discussion of my theoretical orientations in Chapter 1 as well as a description of my methodological framework in this chapter, in the rest of the thesis I will provide a contextual analysis of Cairo as a place of refuge and present my research findings. My aim is not to position one CBO – SAFWAC or the Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi – as better over the other. Nor is it my intention to question UNHCR's and other organizations' community outreach strategies *per se*, but to engage in a critical discussion that can benefit praxis. I, therefore, try to take into consideration different points of views (that of CBOs and external organizations) and I am careful to balance my critique with the socio-political realities on the ground that organizations face in Cairo. In this regard, I am committed to produce productive criticism without polemic that represents everyone's position within the mess of research that can neither be completely objective nor neutral.



## Chapter 3: Refugees and Somali CBO Formation within the Urban Refugee Context of Cairo

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In this Chapter, I will provide a brief contextual analysis of the general socio-economic, legal, and political conditions for refugees in Cairo, including Egypt's refugee policy context and sources of support for refugees. Moreover, I will describe the shift of the UNHCR Cairo office's community outreach strategy from supporting single CBOs towards more centralized approaches. In the second part of this chapter, I will quickly outline the historical movement of Somalis to Egypt, their current main residential areas within Cairo, and introduce Somalis' efforts in CBO-based community building. This will include portraits of the two Somali CBOs under investigation. This initial overview and analysis paves the way for a more detailed discussion of the two CBOs' roles in community-formation and identity construction for their Somali members and their significance in providing assistance for Somalis and their roles in the urban refugee policy context of Cairo.

### 3.1 Cairo as a Place of Refuge

Cairo, the capital city of Egypt, hosting approximately one quarter of the country's 73 million inhabitants according to a census of 2006<sup>115</sup> is often praised for its cosmopolitan character. Indeed, the city has attracted diverse populations and hosts "many different faces, nationalities, traditions, languages, and cultures."<sup>116</sup> Since the turn of the twentieth century, the country has hosted refugee populations of varied nationalities and ethnic backgrounds.<sup>117</sup> As of April 2013, 17,809 asylum seekers and 72,790 refugees were registered with UNHCR, the majority originating from Syria, Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, Iraq,

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<sup>115</sup>Ibid.; David Sims, Marion Séjourné, *The Dynamics of Per-urban Areas around Greater Cairo: A Preliminary Reconnaissance* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2008).

<sup>116</sup>Al-Sharmani and Grabska, "African Refugees and Diasporic Struggles," 455.

<sup>117</sup>Grabska, "Marginalization in Urban Spaces," 288.

Ethiopia and Eritrea.<sup>118</sup> However, especially with the arrival of refugees from Syria and their rising registration with UNHCR, the numbers are likely to increase. In mid-2013, the number of asylum seekers and refugees registered with UNHCR stood already at 18,307 and 183,398 respectively.<sup>119</sup> According to UNHCR's planning figures, the total number of people of concern is expected to rise to 229,700 by December 2015.<sup>120</sup> While these are, of course, only estimations, it illustrates a growing pressure on the organization with regards to financial requirements and the fulfillment of its commitments.

Nonetheless, the actual number of people living in Cairo who fled conflict and persecution is actually unknown, as not everyone who is in need of protection is registered with UNHCR. Approximately 500,000 refugees and migrants from African and Middle Eastern countries are assumed to reside in Egypt,<sup>121</sup> estimations that were made before the influx of Syrians whose number the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs estimated to be between 250,000 and 300,000 in 2013.<sup>122</sup> Grabska and Jacobsen both point out that the vast majority of rejected asylum seekers stay in the country after their file has been closed.<sup>123</sup> Furthermore, UNHCR does not provide for the approximately 70,000 Palestinian refugees living in the country.<sup>124</sup> While not all might find themselves in a situation which requires them to receive protection and/or assistance, the numbers of those in need of one or both are probably higher than those accounted for by UNHCR.

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<sup>118</sup>UNHCR, "UNHCR Egypt Fact Sheet."

<sup>119</sup>UNHCR, "Egypt," *UNHCR*, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e486356#>

<sup>120</sup>UNHCR, "UNHCR Global Appeal 2014-2015."

<sup>121</sup>Zehra Rizvi, "Shifting Sands: Risk and Resilience among Refugee Youth in Cairo," *Women's Refugee Commission* (New York, 2012).

<sup>122</sup>Joel Gulhane, "Syrian refugees in Post-Morsi Egypt," *DailyNews Egypt*, September 3, 2013, <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/09/03/syrian-refugees-in-post-morsi-egypt/>.

<sup>123</sup>Grabska, "Marginalization in Urban Spaces;" Grabska, "Who Asked the Anyways?;" Jacobsen, "Refugees in Urban Area."

<sup>124</sup>Oroub Al-Abed, "Palestinians in Egypt: An Investigation of Livelihood and Coping Strategies" (working paper no. 3, Forced Migration and Refugee Studies, American University in Cairo, 2003); Michael Kagan, "Shared Responsibility in a New Egypt. A Strategy for Refugee Protection," *Center for Migration and Refugee Studies, American University in Cairo*, 2011, 9.

Refugees often end up competing for the same resources and space with the Egyptian poor and have to cope with insecure livelihood conditions, exclusionary policies, and high levels of xenophobia and racism. Hence, the reverse of the medal of Egypt's alleged cosmopolitan character is marginalization of refugees which according to Grabska means "economic, cultural, legal, political, and social inequality and exclusion, a state of 'being underprivileged and excluded'."<sup>125</sup>

Egypt is signatory to the 1951 *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* (hereafter UN Refugee Convention), the 1969 *Organization of African Unity Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa* (hereafter OAU Refugee Convention) and several international human rights treaties.<sup>126</sup> However, Egypt has never created institutional structures for the implementation of its obligations and it placed reservations on several articles of the 1951 Refugee Convention, including restrictions on access to public education, work and social services, consequently enabling the Egyptian Government to exclude refugees from basic rights to which Egyptian nationals are entitled.<sup>127</sup>

While Decree No. 24 of 1992 entitles refugee children to state-public schooling, the decree "is not implemented on a regular and a large-scale basis."<sup>128</sup> Moreover, a structurally overburdened Egyptian school system and high administrative obstacles make an entry highly difficult. Access to work is equally restricted. Under Law No. 12 of 2003 and Ministerial Decree No. 136 of 2003 (amended by Decree No. 227 of 2004), refugees face the same rules with regards to obtaining work permits as any other foreigner. Difficult bureaucratic procedures, high administrative costs, and lack of willingness of employers make it practically impossible for refugees to obtain work permits.<sup>129</sup> Moreover, regardless of their

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<sup>125</sup>Grabska, "Marginalization in Urban Spaces," 290.

<sup>126</sup>Grabska, "Who Asked Them Anyways?," 10, 16.

<sup>127</sup>Al-Sharmani and Grabska, "African Refugees and Diasporic Struggles," 459; Grabska, "Who Asked Them Anyways?," 11.

<sup>128</sup>Al-Sharmani, "Refugees in Egypt," 9.

<sup>129</sup>Michael Kagan, "Shared Responsibility," 5; Rizvi, "Shifting Sands," 4.

length of residence in the country, foreigners are not entitled to citizenship, except for women who are married to an Egyptian male and children born to an Egyptian parent.<sup>130</sup>

Egypt has abdicated most responsibilities concerning refugees and asylum seekers to the UNHCR, including “[a]ll aspects if registration, documentation of refugee status determination.”<sup>131</sup> The fact that Egypt lacks any comprehensive asylum procedures and institutions<sup>132</sup> reveals the unwillingness of the government to officially deal with refugees. With no specialized governmental services for refugees, refugees have to depend on NGOs, charity-based and international organizations for assistance and support. The landscape of organizations which provide some kind of service to refugees (e.g. legal aid, education, social support, health care) is scarce and can, consequently, often only serve those most in need.<sup>133</sup>

Compared to other countries in the Middle East, refugees are less in danger of detention or deportation, are less likely to become victims of police harassment and racially motivated assaults and are more likely to find employment in the informal sector.<sup>134</sup> In many respects, Cairo provides opportunities for refugees, offering “a fluid and thus safer urban space within which refugees can live and pursue their livelihood.”<sup>135</sup> Still, in the last couple of years, refugees have been finding themselves in “a protection crisis”<sup>136</sup> according to Kagan. Incidents of deportation occurred since 2005 after years of relative security of *non-refoulement*. Relationships of trust between UNHCR and the refugee populations have been strained since the deadly dispersal of Sudanese protesters in 2005 and subsequent incidents of

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<sup>130</sup>Government of Egypt, “Nationality,” *Passport, Emigration and Nationality Administration, Ministry of Interior*, n.d.,

<http://www.moiegypt.gov.eg/English/Departments+Sites/Immegration/Nationality/GrantingEgyptianNationality>

<sup>131</sup>Michael Kagan, “‘We Live in a Country of UNHCR’: The UN Surrogate State and Refugee Policy in the Middle East.” (research paper no. 201, New Issues in Refugee Research, UNHCR, Geneva, 2007), 13.

<sup>132</sup>Al-Sharmani, “Refugees in Egypt;” Grabska, “Who Asked Them Anyways.”

<sup>133</sup>UNHCR, *Referral Guide for Refugees and Refugee Service Providers* (Cairo: UNHCR Regional Office Cairo, 2011).

<sup>134</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup>Al Sharmani and Grabska, “African Refugees and Diasporic Struggles,” 462.

<sup>136</sup>Kagan, “Shares Responsibilities,” 4.

protests and occasional violence.<sup>137</sup> Human trafficking routes through the Sinai to Israel have increased the perception of refugees as a security threat and the development of Sudanese youth gangs constitutes a source of insecurity from within the refugee communities.<sup>138</sup> Moreover, the recent socio-political, ideological and emotionally-laden conflicts that started with the ouster of the former President Hosni Mubarak in the beginning of 2011 and the frequent violent clashes between the state and different parts of society since then have made the security situation for refugees more volatile.<sup>139</sup>

### *3.1.1 UNHCR Cairo's Urban Refugee Policies –Protection Crisis, Limited Assistance & Community Outreach*

Since the Memorandum of 1954, Egypt has transferred all major responsibilities towards refugees to the UNHCR.<sup>140</sup> This makes UNHCR's urban refugee policy important to look at. For 45 years, the organization lacked any formal policy concerning refugees living in urban environments. In 1997, UNHCR released its first urban policy.<sup>141</sup> The published document was, however, criticized by numerous human rights advocates and scholars as criminalizing and anachronistic as it did not correspond with the reality of urban areas having become major hubs for refugees. Indeed, UNHCR's own Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit (EPAU) issued similar critique.<sup>142</sup> With its publication of *UNHCR Policy on Refugee*

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<sup>137</sup> Al-Sharmani and Katarzyna Grabska, "African Refugees and Diasporic Struggles;" Kagan, 'Shared Responsibilities.'

<sup>138</sup> Kagan, 'Shared Responsibilities.'

<sup>139</sup> For an analysis of the Egyptian Revolution in January-February 2011 and in the beginnings of 'Arab Spring' in other countries I can refer to the following report: Amnesty International, "State of Human Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: January to Mid-April 2011," *Amnesty International Reports* (Amnesty International, 2011). For a chronology of political events in Egypt between March 2011-March 2014 see: "Timeline: Three years of Egypt's political procedures," *AhramOnline*, March 18, 2014, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/96993.aspx>.

<sup>140</sup> Kagan, "Shared Responsibility."

<sup>141</sup> UNHCR, "Policy on Refugees in Urban Areas" (UNHCR, Geneva, December 1997).

<sup>142</sup> Sarah Dryden-Peterson, "'I Find Myself as Someone Who is in the Forest': Urban Refugees as Agents of Social Change in Kampala, Uganda," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 13, no. 3 (2006); Naoko Obi and Jeff Crisp, "UNHCR - Evaluation of UNHCR's Policy on Refugees in Urban Areas: A Case Study Review of New Delhi," (UNHCR, Geneva, 2002); Stefan Sperl, "UNHCR - Evaluation of UNHCR's Policy on Refugees in Urban Areas: A Case Study Review of Cairo" (UNHCR, Geneva, 2002); Jeff, Crisp, Jane Janz, José Riera, and Shahira

*Protections and Solutions in Urban Areas* in 2009 (hereafter 2009 Urban Refugee Policy), the UNHCR revised its position towards urban refugees, breaking from its previous camp bias and acknowledging that the “mega-trend”<sup>143</sup> of urbanization worldwide also incorporates refugee movements.<sup>144</sup> Verdirame and Pobjoy highlight three basic aspects that constitute a contrast to the old policy: refugees are right holders; urban areas are legitimate locations for refugees; and UNHCR’s mandated responsibilities include the protection of refugees in urban areas.<sup>145</sup>

In contrast to its predecessor, the 2009 Urban Refugee Policy mentions UNHCR’s commitment to reach out to refugee communities and to build relationships with refugees. It provides, for instance, for regular visits of neighborhoods where refugees live as well as special consideration of the needs of refugee women and girls.<sup>146</sup> The latter component stresses the importance of incorporating its community outreach and communications efforts into “a broader strategy to establish a constructive dialogue and positive partnership with refugees in urban areas.”<sup>147</sup> The 2009 Urban Refugee Policy, however, does not make any explicit reference to CBOs.

The UNHCR Cairo office operates “one of the largest and oldest urban refugee programmes.”<sup>148</sup> It is currently situated in 6<sup>th</sup> of October, a satellite town of the greater urban area of Cairo and, hence, far away from most refugees’ residential areas. Besides asylum procedures, UNHCR provides some other services through implementing partners, such as health care through Caritas and scholarship programs for schools through the Catholic Relief

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Samy, “Surviving in the City: A review of UNHCR’s Operation for Iraqi Refugees in Urban Areas of Jordan, Lebanon and Syria” (Policy Development and Evaluation Service, Geneva, 2009); Verdirame, Guglielmo, and Jason M. Pobjoy, “End of Refugee Camps?” (paper no. 29/2013, Legal Studies Research Paper Series, University of Cambridge, 2013).

<sup>143</sup>UNHCR, “UNHCR Policy on Refugee Protections and Solutions in Urban Areas”(UNHCR, Geneva, September 2009), para. 156.

<sup>144</sup>Ibid., para. 1, 3.

<sup>145</sup>Verdirame and Pobjoy, “End of Refugee Camps?,” 479.

<sup>146</sup>UNHCR, “UNHCR Policy on Refugee Protections,” para. 80-81.

<sup>147</sup>Ibid., para. 85.

<sup>148</sup>UNHCR, “Country Operations Plan 2008: Egypt” (Cairo: UNHCR Regional Office Cairo, 2007), 1.

Service (CRS),<sup>149</sup> but these services are highly overburdened and not able to provide assistance for all refugees in need of them.

At the late nineties, UNHCR in Cairo followed the urban policy approach of 1997. Sperl, however, concluded that the minimization and early termination of assistance in an environment in which socio-economic integration and self-reliance is elusive is not only putting more hardship on refugees, but is also counter-productive to the idea of fostering self-sufficiency.<sup>150</sup> As a response to the bloody crackdown of Sudanese protests in front of the UNHCR office in December 2005, the UNHCR Cairo office started to focus on building community assistance structures and to encourage the establishment of refugee associations in 2006 and 2007. UNHCR provided among others training and material assistance. It also put more emphasis on building the capacity of NGOs serving to refugees.<sup>151</sup> In its operation plan for 2008 and 2009, it reported its increased communication with CBOs through information dissemination, regular meeting and briefing sessions and highlighted its cooperation with six CBOs representing mainly persons of concern from Sudan and Somalia.<sup>152</sup>

Overall, the decentralized nature of Cairo makes it extremely difficult to establish and maintain contacts with the various refugee communities. The rising number of CBOs in recent years seems, hence, to be a welcoming possibility for UNHCR to facilitate its outreach.<sup>153</sup> However, as was explained to me by former and current staff of the UNHCR Community Service Team in Cairo, the team started to shift its community outreach approach since 2007. Firstly, it started to work more through two new implementing partners:

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<sup>149</sup>Rizvi, "Shifting Sands."

<sup>150</sup>Sperl, "Evaluation of UNHCR's Policy."

<sup>151</sup>UNHCR, "Country Operation Plan: Executive Committee Summary. Country: Arab Republic of Egypt. Planning Year: 2005" (Cairo: UNHCR Regional Office Cairo, 2004); UNHCR, "Country Operations Plan: Executive Committee Summary. Arab Republic of Egypt. Planning Year: 2007" (Cairo: UNHCR Regional Office Cairo, 2006).

<sup>152</sup>UNHCR, "Country Operations Plan 2008," 7.

<sup>153</sup>Rizvi, "Shifting Sands."

Tadamon and the “Psychosocial Training Institute in Cairo” (PSTIC). PSTIC trains refugees to work as psycho-social workers within the refugee communities and has taken over most of the community outreach with regards to psycho-social issues. The UNHCR Cairo office nurtures a close collaboration with PSTIC, receiving daily updates from the organization or using its network to disseminate information to refugees.<sup>154</sup> Tadamon is a local NGO which currently runs – with the financial help of UNHCR – five refugee centers, distributed throughout the city, including Hadayek el Maadi, Ar di Liwa and the SAFWAC center in Nasr City.<sup>155</sup> These centers are open to all refugees and provide activities, such as vocational and language training. They constitute main venues for UNHCR to meet refugees and to implement community programs. In addition, UNHCR finances a micro-grant project through Tadamon. CBOs and refugee groups can apply for these grants to finance activities that promote livelihoods or foster integration with Egyptians or between different refugee groups. Those groups whose application is accepted also receive some project management and budgeting training prior to the start of their projects

Secondly, while in the past, UNHCR used to consider single CBOs created by refugees for financial support, such as rent payment, it retracted from this policy in 2010 due to incidences of fraud, misuse of provided funds, and the rising number of request of CBOs for financial support and instead limits financial assistance to the Tadamon centers.<sup>156</sup> The decision to cut funding for CBOs can also be explained by a decreasing budget for community outreach activities. The UNHCR budget for Cairo was revised from nearly USD 14 million in 2013 to USD 65.1 million. However, the majority of this budget increase is devoted to the emergency response for Syrians.<sup>157</sup> By contrast, the budget for community

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<sup>154</sup>UNHCR Senior Community Service Assistant, interview by author, UNHCR Cairo office, November 14, 2013.

<sup>155</sup>Tadamon Council, “Welcome to Tadamon,” 2014, <http://tadamoncouncil.org/>.

<sup>156</sup>UNHCR Senior Community Service Assistant; Former Assistant Community Service Officer, interview by author, UNHCR Cairo Office, November 25, 2013.

<sup>157</sup>UNCHR, “UNHCR Global Appeal 2014-2015. Egypt,” *UNHCR* (2013), <http://unhcr.org/528a0a2b0.html>.



mobilization and self-reliance programs was reduced from approximately USD 1.9 million to USD 1.7 million in the same time period.<sup>158</sup>

The team still meets refugee groups. If needed, it takes the initiative to convene meetings with refugee communities. For example, UNHCR convened a meeting with NGOs and CBOs after the Revolution in January 2011 to discuss options for more coordinated responses in future crisis situations,<sup>159</sup> and met with Somali community leaders in 2013 when more than sixty Somali unaccompanied minors came to the attention of UNHCR.<sup>160</sup> Usually, however, refugee groups (e.g. CBOs or less formalized groups with some form of representation, but not individuals) are required to request meetings in written form at UNHCR. If UNHCR approves the request, a meeting is convened during which an action plan is established. Usually, one or more follow-up meetings in three-month intervals take place. The UNHCR used to meet these groups in the communities but after some tensions during meetings, which once even turned slightly violent, the office decided to meet at the premises of UNHCR. Overall, however, UNHCR has fewer meetings with and within the refugee communities than it used to.

Overall, the institutional network within which UNHCR operates has changed over the last decade. On the one hand, new NGOs have been established that serve for refugees. While UNHCR directly cooperates with PSTIC and Tadamon, the establishment of the NGO AMERA, providing legal and psychosocial support, can be seen as a source of pressure on UNHCR to meet its commitments, especially concerning sound refugee status determination procedures. On the other hand, UNHCR has to respond to the increasing demands of refugee groups to be heard. Somali and Sudanese groups, including CBOs, have been active in initiating negotiations with the UNHCR Cairo office to mitigate Somalis' and Sudanese'

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<sup>158</sup>UNCHR, "UNHCR Global Report 2012: Egypt," *UNHCR* (2012), <http://www.unhcr.org/51b1d63816.html>; UNHCR, "UNHCR Global Appeal 2014-2015. Egypt," *UNHCR* (2013), <http://unhcr.org/528a0a2b0.html>.

<sup>159</sup>Samakab, interview by author, Somali community center in Hadayek el Maadi, November 13, 2013.

<sup>160</sup>UNHCR Senior Community Service Assistant.

protests in front of UNHCR or to advocate for refugees' rights and needs.<sup>161</sup> However, the Community Service Team is in less regular contact with various refugee communities as is, for instance, AMERA which operates a specialized Community Outreach Team comprised of Syrian, Sudanese, Somali, Ethiopian, and Eritrean community outreach officers.<sup>162</sup> Still, when thinking about population management as an umbrella orientation for the work of institutions, UNHCR cannot deny the impact that an increased number of actors in the urban refugee policy and service-provision sector have. An increase in advocacy and service provision by an increasing number of organizations may help reduce the tendency of merely treating refugees in terms of numbers and give a more human face to the provision of protection and assistance to refugees.

### **3.2 Somalis in Egypt: Refugees, Émigrés, Students**

The history of Somalis coming to Egypt dates back at least to the late sixties and early seventies. From that time until the early nineties, the number of Somalis was small and comprised mainly of three groups: students who came on a scholarship to study at a national university; diplomats and their families; and Somali families whose breadwinner was working in one of the Gulf countries and who wanted to be close to him and provide a Muslim education for their children in a relatively modern country. With the escalation of the civil war and the collapse of the Somali state in 1991, a first larger wave of Somali refugees entered Egypt in the early nineties. While most of these refugees came from Somalia, some joined their families from one of the Gulf countries. The educational level of this group of refugees was high and many held university degrees and/or professional jobs. They also varied in clan affiliation, sex, and age group. The majority of them were subsequently

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<sup>161</sup>Mulki A-Sharmani, "Diasporic Somalis in Cairo: The Poetics and Practices of Soomaalinimo," in *From Mogadishu to Dixon: The Somali Diaspora in a Global Context*, eds. Abdi M. Kusow and Stephanie R. Bjork (Trenton: Red Sea Press, 2007), 71; Al-Sharmani, "Refugees and citizens," Al-Sharmani and Grabska, "African Refugees and Diasporic Struggles;" Nastexa, interview by author, SAFWAC center, November 26, 2013.

<sup>162</sup>AMERA Somali Community Outreach Officer.

resettled to North America, Europe, and Australia.<sup>163</sup> Most Somali refugees who are residing in Cairo these days arrived after 1999. The demographic composition remained similar though larger proportions nowadays comprise mothers with their children and Somalis with a lower educational level than previously the case.<sup>164</sup>

Nowadays, one can identify three groups when differentiating them on basis of their legal status in the country. The largest group comprises those who come to Egypt to seek protection. As of April 2013, 1,395 Somali asylum seekers and 6,408 recognized refugees were officially registered with the UNHCR Cairo office.<sup>165</sup> According to its Global Funding Appeal for 2014-2015, the UNHCR estimates the number of Somali refugees and asylum seekers to increase to approximately 9,000 people of concern by December 2015.<sup>166</sup> These figures do not include those Somalis who have been resettled over the years.

Secondly, Somalis with citizenship of a Western country – termed ‘émigrés’ by Al-Sharmani – have been moving to Cairo to “escape the limitations of their lives as marginalized – albeit – legal citizens”<sup>167</sup> and to seek an Islamic education for their children. During the time of her research between 2001 and 2003, Al-Sharmani estimated the number of these families to be a little bit more than two hundred.<sup>168</sup> However, through informal discussions with Somalis during my research as well as in an interview with the Somali community outreach officer at AMERA, I was told that after the political upheavals sparking off when the former President Mohamed Morsi was deposed on July 3, 2013, many Somalis with Western citizenship went back to Europe, North America or even returned back to

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<sup>163</sup>Mulki Al-Sharmani, “Refugees in Egypt: Transit Migrants?,” *Social Research Center & Forced Migration and Refugee Studies Program, American University in Cairo* (2008).

<sup>164</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup>UNHCR, “UNHCR Egypt Fact Sheet April 2013” (unpublished document, Geneva, 2013).

<sup>166</sup>UNHCR, “UNHCR Global Appeal 2014-2015. Egypt,” *UNHCR* (2013), <http://unhcr.org/528a0a2b0.html>.

<sup>167</sup>Mulki Al-Sharmani, “Refugees and citizens: The Somali diaspora in Cairo” (PhD diss., American University in Cairo, 2005), 4.

<sup>168</sup>Al-Sharmani, “Transnational Somali Families,” 89.

Somalia.<sup>169</sup> The actual number of Somali émigrés is, thus, uncertain though it can be expected that it is lower than before.

A third legal group of Somalis are students who come to Cairo on a scholarship based on the cooperation between the Egyptian and Somali governments. In addition, some of the male and female Somalis I interviewed at SAFWAC had come to Egypt during their high school age. They continued their secondary schooling in Egypt before continuing to go to university. They stay in Egypt on student visas as well.

However, these three groups are legal categories and neither are their boundaries static nor do they necessarily prescribe any particular form of identity, attitude, or feeling towards their presence in Egypt. One CBO leader at SAFWAC, for instance, applied for asylum to prevent returning back to his unsafe homeland after the completion of his studies and expiration of his student visa. Moreover, as will be shown in the subsequent chapter, members who either identify as student, migrants or refugees or are identified by others as one of the above listed categories can move in complex ways between different structures and identities.

Somalis have been concentrating in different parts of Cairo. Figure 1.1 displays the most residential areas where Somalis live. The vast majority of Somalis can be found in Ard el-Liwa and its vicinity (e.g. Sahafiyeen) as well as Nasr City and its vicinity (e.g. Masr el Gedida).<sup>170</sup> Ard el-Liwa is located on the western site of the Nile in the Giza Governorate in the Mohandeseen district and is a “typical poor neighborhood”<sup>171</sup> in the city. Nasr City is a district in the northwestern part of Cairo. It is a much bigger area and is generally more upper-class compared to Ard el-Liwa. However, within Nasr City itself Somalis often live segregated according to their economic status. Other socio-economically better situated

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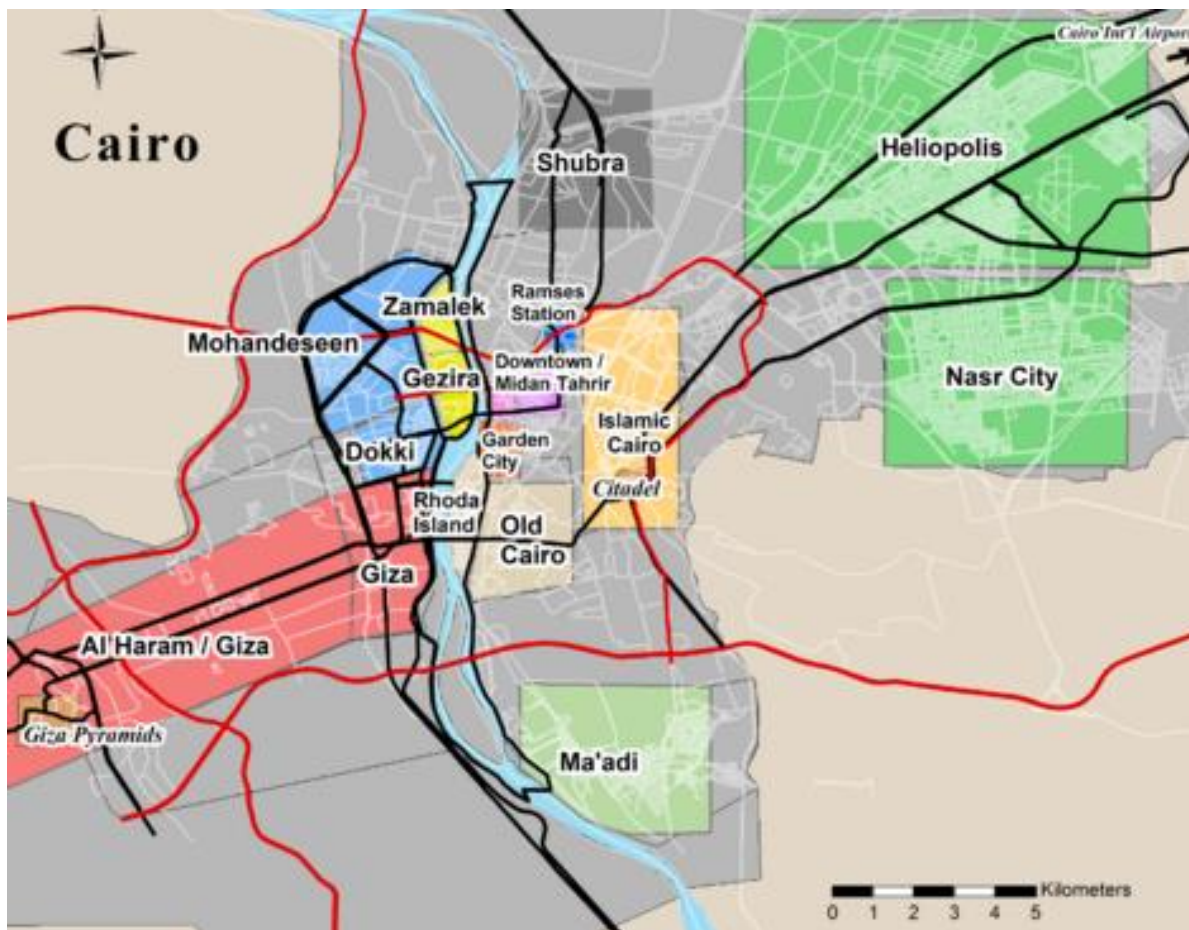
<sup>169</sup> AMERA Somali Community Outreach Officer, interview by author, Nasr City, September 3, 2013; Somali woman at SAFWAC, personal communication with author, SAFWAC, October 26, 2013.

<sup>170</sup> Al-Sharmani, “Refugees and Citizens,” 63.

<sup>171</sup> Al-Sharmani and Grabsk, 469.

Somalis live in newly established and higher-price satellite towns at the outskirts of Greater Cairo, such as 6<sup>th</sup> of October and El Rehab. Some Somali refugees live with these Somali émigré when they work for them as housemaids.<sup>172</sup> More recently, a small number of Somalis started to settle down in a Hadayek el Maadi, a densely populated lower class neighborhood within the generally more affluent Maadi area in the south of Cairo. The number of Somalis in the neighborhood has grown from merely two or three families to approximately 200 Somali individuals over the last ten years.<sup>173</sup>

Figure 1: Map of Cairo's main neighbourhoods<sup>174</sup>



<sup>172</sup> AMERA Community Outreach Officer.

<sup>173</sup> Samakab.

<sup>174</sup> "Cairo," *WikiTravel*, n.d., <http://wikitravel.org/en/Cairo>.

### *3.2.1 Somali CBO-Building in Cairo*

Trajectories for community formation through CBO-building among Somalis have been taking place since the beginning of the century. The organizational activities of Somalis can be contextualized within UNHCR's policy approach of minimal assistance at that time. A substantial drop in available funding in 1999 and 2000 led to a diminution of subsistence allowance and a decrease in support for health care and education. This and the fact that many asylum seekers remained unassisted left many refugees and asylum-seekers without adequate support.<sup>175</sup>

The first "informal association"<sup>176</sup> of Somalis in Cairo started with a series of meetings convened by Somali refugees and expatriates in summer 2001 which geared at organizing community work that should address the needs of Somali refugees. The meetings resulted in the establishment of the 'Somali Refugee Community of Egypt' (SRCOE). SRCOE was run by seventeen male and female refugees from different clans and residential areas in Cairo.<sup>177</sup> An apartment was rented in Ard el-Liwa and Somalis engaged in fundraising for educational materials to run classes.<sup>178</sup> Moreover, it engaged in a series of negotiations with UNHCR to advocate for the rights and needs of Somali refugees in Egypt and established a home schooling project for children.<sup>179</sup> Due to the resettlement of some SRCOE leaders and internal conflicts, divisions occurred. The organization continued to exist at least until 2010,<sup>180</sup> but new organizations were set up as well.

Another CBO was set up in Ard el-Liwa in 2004, called 'Somali Organization for Development' (SODO). In the first year of the existence of the center, money was collected

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<sup>175</sup>Sperl, "Evaluation of UNHCR's Policy."

<sup>176</sup>Mulki A-Sharmani, "Diasporic Somalis in Cairo," 71; SRCOE, "The Somali Refugee Community of Egypt: Articles of Organization" (unpublished work, MRC Grey Files Collection, Library of the American University in Cairo, 2001).

<sup>177</sup>Al-Sharmani, "Refugees and Citizens," 54

<sup>178</sup>Mulki Al-Sharmani, e-mail message to author, April 7, 2014; Mulki Al-Sharmani, e-mail message to author, April 8, 2014.

<sup>179</sup>Al-Sharmani, "Diasporic Somalis in Cairo," 71.

<sup>180</sup>Al-Sharmani, email to author, April 9, 2014.

from members to pay for rent and other expenses. Then, UNHCR started to take over the payment of rent. The center offered several educational activities, such as Math, computer and Arabic classes, and counted around 100 students. Small fees were raised from students to pay for teachers. However, when UNHCR stopped covering rent cost, the center had to close down in 2010.<sup>181</sup>

Two other associations were established in late 2003 and early 2004 and located in Nasr City. One was the ‘Somali Society for Refugee Development’ (SSRD). It offered among others computer and English classes and was equally engaged in discussions with the UNHCR Cairo office.<sup>182</sup> I am not aware at this point if SSRD is still operating or not. ‘Egyptian Somali for Development’ (ESD), started off as a CBO under the name ‘Somali Umbrella for Development,’ but has become a legally organization in 2009. The organization runs educational activities. Furthermore, the legal recognition enables the organization to cooperate with Egyptian organizations and institutions – such as Al Azhar University, the Egyptian Foodbank and hospitals – to receive assistance and services and to get in contact with the Egyptian Government. UNHCR used to cover the rent of the organization, but this stopped when ESD rejected to become part of Tadamon due to their desire to stay completely independent.<sup>183</sup>

The Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi and SAFWAC were created in 2011. The ideas for creating both CBOs existed prior to 2011. However, their opening was catalyzed by the turn of events starting off with the Egyptian Revolution in 2011 and can be seen within the wider momentum of rupture of power structures and the formation of popular committees in all neighborhood of Cairo to deal with insecurity and unrest during the

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<sup>181</sup>Two community leaders in Ard el-Liwa.

<sup>182</sup>Al-Sharmani, “Refugees and Citizens,” 198.

<sup>183</sup>Interview with the Chairman and two community leaders of Egyptian-Somali for Development (ESD), interview by author, ESD office, March 29, 2014.

eighteen days of unrest which culminated in the ouster of former President Hosni Mubarak in February 2011.<sup>184</sup>

### *3.2.1 Case Study #1: The Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi*

While Sudanese associations and an Oromo CBO have already been existing for some time in Maadi, a Somali CBO was not opened before 2011. One explanation might be that compared to the numbers of Sudanese and Ethiopians residing in Hadayek el Maadi and the adjunct neighborhood of Arab Maadi, the Somali population is with approximately 200 individuals, small. Most Somalis in the neighborhood are female. While the majority of Somalis are registered with UNHCR, some Somali students are residing in the area as well.<sup>185</sup> The center of the Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi is located in a little side alley in the densely populated lower-class neighborhood of Hadayek el Maadi. No sign denotes the existence of the center. However, the walls of the entrance room colored in the light blue color of the Somali flag signify that you have entered the Somali community center. Plastic chairs are usually lined up along the walls of the small cubical room. Two little folding tables stand in the middle. A white board and, a pin board with information leaflets and some hand-made purses and bags are on the walls. In the back of the apartment are a little kitchen unit, a toilet and another little room with a desk and a cupboard filled with books and copied material.

While ideas to create a center which would serve as a meeting point for Somalis in the area existed before, the unfolding of the Revolution in January 2011 created the momentum to establish an office. The problems that arose out of the general unrest on the street, the disconnection of all communication services for a few days, as well as the closure of important service providers such as Caritas and UNHCR were driving forces. Somalis locked

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<sup>184</sup>Jennifer Ann Bremer, "Leadership and Collective Action in Egypt's Popular Committees: Emergence of Authentic Civic Activism in the Absence of the State," *The International Journal of Not-for-Profit Law* 13, no. 4 (2011), [http://www.icnl.org/research/journal/vol13iss4/art\\_2.htm](http://www.icnl.org/research/journal/vol13iss4/art_2.htm).

<sup>185</sup>Samakab.



themselves up at home and did not dare to leave their apartments. Another major problem during the unrest was the spreading of false information, for example that all refugees would be evacuated to Turkey.<sup>186</sup> What came to the fore was that Somalis within the neighborhood lacked mechanisms to get in contact with each other and to make sure that everyone was safe.<sup>187</sup>

Two of the main initiators for the opening of a center were Samakab, who became the first President of the center, and Cilmi, who was appointed the first Vice-President. Still, in the memories of the CBO leaders the CBO was a community project.<sup>188</sup> Several Somalis from the neighborhood started discussing the idea and approached two of the oldest female Somalis living in the neighborhood, as it is part of the Somali culture to always consult the eldest community members for advice.<sup>189</sup> Several meetings were held in the apartment of these two older women during which the plans for opening an office were concretized. Money was collected from Somalis from within the neighborhood. Already before the office was opened, they started meeting in the Oromo CBO located in the neighborhood where they also participated in training on community building and refugee rights organized by AMERA. The option of co-jointly using the center with the Oromo community was discussed, but finally rejected by the majority of Somalis who were active then, as they desired for an autonomous space in which they could feel comfortable. In their view, an inclusion of foreigners would have prevented this.<sup>190</sup> The existence of distinct Somali, Oromo and Sudanese CBOs hints at the significance of CBOs as spaces of community formation along national and ethnic lines which will be further discussed in Chapter 4.

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<sup>186</sup>Cilmi, interview by author, Somali community center in Hadayek el Maadi, October 27, 2013.

<sup>187</sup>Samatar, interview by author, Somali community center in Hadayek el Maadi, October 10, 2013.

<sup>188</sup>Cilmi; Samakab; Xoriyo, interview by author, Somali community center in Hadayek el Maadi, October 28, 2013.

<sup>189</sup>Cilmi.

<sup>190</sup>Samatar.

Structurally, the Somali CBO started off with a President as its leader. Over time, the number of leading positions was extended, including the position of a Vice President and other posts to spread responsibilities. Posts comprise treasurers, coordinators for educational and sportive activities, and communication managers. All office holders are elected by Somali CBO members during general meetings. Together, they form a committee that run the main activities of the CBO. Samakab, one of the main initiators of the CBO and the former President, described the committee to “work as a team.”<sup>191</sup> The committee members are meeting on a regular basis, usually twice a month. However, Cilmi, the current President, and Samakab are usually meeting separately every week to discuss issues of concern. Both have been already active in helping Somalis in the neighborhood prior to the establishment of the center. While the main decisions are usually taken by the committee, meetings open to all CBO members are convened on a regular basis, either to jointly discuss and make decisions considering the center and its activities or to provide information.<sup>192</sup>

The CBO is completely self-funded with regards to covering rent and bills. Every month, money is collected from Somalis in the neighborhood as a financial community contribution. They are not asked to pay a specific amount, but to contribute as much as they can. In the beginning, when the rooms were completely empty, Somalis from the neighborhood also either donated money or chairs to furnish the center and to buy supplies. So far, the only external source for funding was one Tadamon micro-grant with which they were able to pay a teacher to run crochet courses during most of the year of 2013.

One of the first activities was to register all Somalis into a book and to note down their contact details. Since then, newly arriving Somalis are usually registered. The center is mostly open from Thursday to Saturday when most women and children are off from work and school. During these days, CBO leaders and members run activities on a voluntary basis.

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<sup>191</sup>Samakab.

<sup>192</sup>Ibid.

Activities include English, Arabic and Somali classes; crochet courses; Quran lessons; and sports activities such as football. Warsame, a medical student, provides health check-ups and consultations in the center several times per week.<sup>193</sup> Cilmi and Samakab also meet Somalis there who need advice. Another effort of the CBO is to encourage Somali children to go to school. Through home visits and workshops, some of the community leaders have, for example tried to identify the obstacles for children, especially girls, to go to school and to raise awareness among children and parents about the importance of education.<sup>194</sup> At the time of my research, CBO leaders and members were also discussing the idea to implement a group saving system for emergencies. While this would not allow them to cover high medical bills or something similar, they could, for example, use the money to pay for transportation costs.<sup>195</sup>

### *3.2.2 Case Study #2: The Somali Association for Women and Children (SAFWAC)*

Nasr City, a district in the northwestern part of Cairo, hosts the second largest Somali population after Ard el-Liwa. The SAFWAC center is located in an apartment of a multi-story building in a neighborhood called Bawab Tani where many poor Somali refugees live. A number of Somali cafés and internet cafés and a Somali tailor shop in the area indicate the presence of the community. In the evenings, one can also often find Somali boys playing football on a huge car park close by.

The center consists of a large rectangle entrance room, a kitchen, a bathroom and two smaller rooms which are used as class rooms. The entrance room contains a desk with a computer and a printer and cupboards for storage. The walls of the first room are painted in red and decorated with several paintings made by children, a picture of the current Somali

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<sup>193</sup>Warsame, interview by author, Somali community center in Hadayek el Maadi, December 10, 2013.

<sup>194</sup>Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi, "Proposal for Micro-grant Project by the Somali Community Organization in Hadayek el Maadi" (unpublished document, application handed in to Tadamon for a micro-grant application, 2013).

<sup>195</sup>Samakab, personal communication with author, Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi, March 28, 2014.

President Hassan Sheikh Mohamoud, and a pin board with information leaflets and papers containing the motivational proverbs that guide the missions and visions of SAFWAC. The walls of the two classrooms and the curtains are in the light blue color of the Somali flag. Three old disconnected computers are lined up in the walk-through room. The kitchen is equipped with a stove, a fridge and a sink. Chairs are available in abundance so that one sometimes has the impression there is no space for all of them.

The idea of creating a Somali center specifically for women and children was driven by a group of Somali female students. Prior to the opening of SAFWAC, these female students had met at the Somali Student Union. Between 2008 and 2010, they organized regular lectures and workshops, either held by a Somali student or by external speakers. The idea, so Nastexa, the present SAFWAC President and then board member of the Somali Student Union, was to mutually educate each other and to share expertise. It was during this time, that she and several other women started discussing the idea to open a center. They were also already active in raising awareness among Somalis for various issues, for example through a campaign in cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO) to educate Somalis about the bird flu.<sup>196</sup>

A driving force for the female students to establish a center was that they lacked a place to address Somalis which, in turn, made it equally difficult for Somalis to access them. Their main aim was to create a place for women and children until the age of eighteen. As in the case of the Somali center in Maadi, the political upheavals in January-February 2011 played a role in fostering the opening of the center. As Nastexa explained, while preparations have started beforehand, the problems that arouse out of the unrest fuelled support for the center among other Somalis.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>196</sup>Nastexa.

<sup>197</sup>Ibid.

According to Rukia, one of the SAFWAC founders, they “did not set up the office in one night and day.”<sup>198</sup> It took them a long time to prepare. Such preparations included finding support for the idea within the Somali population and searching for funding among Somalis. Eighteen Somali men agreed to contribute monthly to the payment of rent.<sup>199</sup> They also addressed the Somali-Egyptian organization ESD to discuss their plans.<sup>200</sup> The leadership of this center was supportive of their idea and facilitated the contacting of people. Bawab Tani was chosen as a location as it was close to most homes of Somalis in Nasr City, especially those with less financial stability.<sup>201</sup>

The center was officially opened in July 2011. Prior to that, the founders set up a curriculum for educational activities. They made countless phone calls and literally knocked on many doors to announce their opening and invite Somalis to an open-day event. On the open day event, about seventy women attended and some registered for offered courses. In the first six months of their existence, the costs for rent of the space continued to be borne by some Somali men. After that, UNHCR took over the rent costs through Tadamon. Tadamon was searching for a new branch in Nasr City at that time and due to the positive impression of SAFWAC, decided to cooperate with it instead of opening a separate center.<sup>202</sup> SAFWAC has, thus, become part of Tadamon but stays independent as an organization. One advantage of this cooperation is that they are legally registered under the umbrella of Tadamon. Besides covering the rent, Tadamon uses the premises from time to time to organize events or activities for Somalis and non-Somalis.<sup>203</sup>

Similar to the Somali center in Maadi, the center is headed by a President. A committee of two male and eight female Somalis, mainly university students or recent

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<sup>198</sup>Rukia, interview by author, SAFWAC center, November 2, 2013.

<sup>199</sup>AMERA Community Outreach Officer.

<sup>200</sup>Ibid.; Nastexa.

<sup>201</sup>Khadra, interview by author, SAFWAC center, November 2, 2013.

<sup>202</sup>Head of Tadamon, interview by author, Tadamon center Feysal, March 26, 2013.

<sup>203</sup>Nastexa.

graduates, are responsible for the running of the center. The committee usually meets twice a month and decides about the activities that are run at the center, organizes teachers and sets up a curriculum. Each committee member has been appointed for specific tasks according to their relevant experiences in various fields including human development, communications and psychosocial support. Moreover, some of the committee members rotate to be present in the center one day a week and/or to take attendance of one or several courses.<sup>204</sup>

SAFWAC pursues a less consultative approach than the Somali center in Maadi when it comes to collective decision-making. The committee does not convene regular community meetings with other CBO members like the CBO in Maadi, but only when they need to discuss something of concern with everyone.<sup>205</sup> However, the CBO leaders frequently address students on an individual basis to learn about how classes are running. In addition, they ask Somali CBO members about their preferences for activities.<sup>206</sup> Surveys are handed out after the finalization of a course period to assess what participants liked about the course and what they could improve in the future.<sup>207</sup>

SAFWAC has a strict non-clan policy and is open to all Somali women and children to pursue educational activities.<sup>208</sup> The center offers a variety of courses, including handicrafts, language, computer and coiffeur courses, Quran lessons and other courses (such as cooking) from time to time. Usually, the courses are organized by the committee. However, Somali CBO members have shown initiative in organizing courses as well. For example, when some women wanted to have cooking classes, they collected money to buy a stove and installed it in the kitchen of the center.<sup>209</sup> In addition to regular courses, awareness raising lectures and workshops, artistic workshops or activities for children are organized

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<sup>204</sup>Nastexa; Rukia; Salma, interview by author, SAFWAC center, November 2, 2013; Farhan, interview by author, SAFWAC center, November 12, 2013; Subeyda, interview by author, SAFWAC center, November 28, 2013.

<sup>205</sup>Salma.

<sup>206</sup>Khadra.

<sup>207</sup>Nastexa, personal communication with author, SAFWAC, November 25, 2013.

<sup>208</sup>Nastexa.

<sup>209</sup>Rukia.

from time to time, either by SAFWAC members or by organizations from outside (e.g. by Medicine Sans Frontières, AMERA, medical students). These are usually also open to Somali men who are equally able to use the facilities to such activities.<sup>210</sup>

It also manages a group saving project for women. Two physical boxes are stored in the office and locked away. The CBO leaders have the keys to open them. In one box, women can put money each week for savings. In times of need, a participant can borrow money from the box and pay it back without interest. In the second box, women can donate a small amount for *sadaqah* (Islamic term for ‘voluntary charity’) every week which they cannot get back. Payments of every participant and amounts paid out to participants are noted down in a book. Against the backdrop of lacking access to banks and loans, the saving system helps women to save up money and to borrow larger amounts of money if they face financial difficulties or larger expenses to pay at once (e.g. for funerals, weddings).<sup>211</sup>

With regards to the regular courses, either committee members and other Somalis teach on a voluntary basis or non-Somali teachers are brought in from outside, the latter usually receiving a small salary. Some of the courses, such as Quran and Somali lessons, are completely free of charge. For other classes, expenses are covered with Tadamon micro-grants and/or a small fee is raised. Sometimes, class participants are asked to contribute some additional money in the course of the class period in order to ensure the continuation of courses or to buy supplies that have run out or gone missing.<sup>212</sup> The interest for courses have grown steadily so SAFWAC has been encountering bottlenecks with regards to accommodating all those interested in classes so that SAFWAC has been forced to create a waiting list.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>210</sup>Nastexa; Salma; Rukia; Faadi, interview by author, SAFWAC center, November 30, 2013.

<sup>211</sup>Nastexa.

<sup>212</sup>Rukia.

<sup>213</sup>Nastexa.

### 3.3 Conclusion

The situation of urban refugees must be understood within a multi-layered framework of interrelated factors regarding national and international regimes and policies; the economic, political, social and cultural conditions of the host country; livelihood opportunities; social networks; different national and refugee-related institutions; host-guest relationships and desired and pursued notions of integration.

The necessity to provide protection and services to ten thousands of refugees has arguably a dehumanizing effect on people which are seemingly reduced to abstractions in a large population management system. It resonates with the concept of bio-politics, whether in a more Agambenian sense of the exercise of bio-power by sovereign states whereby the status of non-citizens can be reduced to a state of ‘bare life’ with fewer rights, or complete lack thereof, than citizens;<sup>214</sup> or in a late Foucauldian sense of governing the human race on the basis of statistics.<sup>215</sup> Identity is seemingly reduced to the management of categories and numbers. The dramatic increase in the number of people of concern giving been arriving in Cairo seems to fuel rather than reduce this tendency.

Against this background, as well as limited rights and assistance for refugees, and complete lack thereof for those outside the protection and assistance framework, it is of interest how refugees and migrants self-organize. In the following I will look at what effects SAWAFC and the Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi can have with regards to engendering identity and community formation, providing services for their members from bottom-up rather than top-down, and advocating for refugees’ rights to be more fully acknowledged. This also requires to critically analyze the CBOs differentiated position in the

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<sup>214</sup>Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

<sup>215</sup>Michel Foucault, “Lecture 11: 17 March 1976,” in *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College de France, 1975-76*, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador Press, 2003), 242-46.



refugee policy framework and the influence of UNHCR's and other organizations' strategies in reaching out to refugee populations.

## Chapter 4: Place, Structure, Agency: Identity Construction & Community Formation among Somali CBO Members

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Two of my questions directed towards Somali interlocutors in both CBOs ask for their understanding of community (Somali word used *bulshuur*) in general as well as their perceptions of the existence of a Somali community in Cairo and, if existent, how it manifests itself. I asked these questions in order to gain insight into their subjective definitions and the extent to which each CBO (*ururbulsho*) plays a role in it. Among both members at SAFWAC and the Somali center in Maadi many had a goal- or interest-oriented understanding of community, using examples such as collective problem solving and mutual help as a group. However, differences in research participants' understanding of community were identifiable with regard to their relation to their residential neighborhood and the CBO itself. In the following, I will look at how Somalis' conditions in exile (as refugees and as part of a diasporic group) contribute to their networking and understanding of community. Then, I will shed light on how the locality in different neighborhoods and the relation of Somalis toward the CBOs and among members within them shape perceptions of Somalis in the different neighborhoods and CBOs. In this regards, internal decision-making structures provide one angle of analysis.

### **4.1 Bases of Community Formations: 'Becoming Refugee' & 'Becoming Somali'**

Many of my interlocutors' stories told the hardships of being in exile and being foreign, of being stripped off their rights and opportunities, of being alienated and alone. Community was perceived to be something to rely on; something Somalis needed because of their

difficult circumstances. ‘Somali community’ was mainly regarded as entailing Somalis coming together to solve problems and to help one another as a collective.<sup>216</sup> Research participants explained to me frequently that while in Somalia family and relatives constituted the main social systems, the lack thereof in Cairo made Somali refugees reliant on each other. The acts of mutual support discern elements of community formation through daily practices.<sup>217</sup>

Moreover, lack of familiar support structures combined with generally restrictive rights and limited livelihood opportunities fostered their feelings and awareness of what Malkki called ‘refugeeness.’<sup>218</sup> Respondents were often stressing how their position as foreigners and refugees negatively affected their lives in Cairo. Malkki describes life in exile metaphorically as a “battle with wilderness.”<sup>219</sup> She, thereby, stresses that refugeeness is not about suddenly *being*, but gradually *becoming*.<sup>220</sup> Accordingly, it is “a complex and dynamic process of becoming . . . a gradual transformation, not an automatic result of crossing of a national border.”<sup>221</sup> In other words, experiences in exile contribute to refugees’ perceptions of identity. This, in turn, can influence notions of community and manifestations of community formation. Al-Sharmani, for instance, describes how lack of resources fosters Somalis’ interest in sharing livelihoods and forming closer community connections among one another. These activities, then, become sources of identity construction.<sup>222</sup>

Another major foundation of community formation that crystalized out of research respondents’ statements is *soomaalinimo*, literally meaning ‘Somaliness.’ Ladan, one of the

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<sup>216</sup>Filsan, interview by author, Somali community center in Hadayek el Maadi, October 12, 2013; Ladan, interview by author, Somali community center in Hadayek el Maadi, October 25, 2013; Caaisho; Samatar, Ubax, Warsame,

<sup>217</sup>Mulki Al-Sharmani, “Refugees and Citizens,” 25; Laura Hammond, *This Place Will Become Home: Refugee Repatriation to Ethiopia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 15.

<sup>218</sup>Liisa H. Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

<sup>219</sup>*Ibid.*, 113

<sup>220</sup>*Ibid.*, 113-114

<sup>221</sup>*Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>222</sup>Al-Sharmani, “Refugees and Citizens.”

CBO members in Maadi, used a Somali proverb to describe to me her understanding of *soomaalinimo*, which translates more or less into ‘*soomaalinimo* can be born, but it cannot be imitated’ (*Soomaalinimo waa loodhashaa ee layskama dhigo*).<sup>223</sup> Originating from the same region and being of one blood may constitute the basis for feelings of connections, even with non-relatives with whom Somalis had generally not sought the same degree of connections back in their home country. Some interlocutors stressed their distinctiveness from other nationalities. Their frequent descriptions of how Somalis would help and visit each other in times of need exemplifies that they saw other Somalis rather than refugees of other nationalities or Egyptians as first reference points for networks and support. Indeed, some, like Siman and Dahabo, pointed out that Somalis were distinct from Sudanese and Egyptians because of their distinct language and culture.<sup>224</sup> An essentialization of Somali identity became also apparent when making research participants choose between a center exclusively for Somalis and one shared by refugees from all nationalities. While not rejecting the idea of interacting with other refugee communities *per se*, everyone I asked this question regarded it as vital to have a place specifically for Somalis.<sup>225</sup> The comments highlight the importance that interlocutors attribute to having a space where they could meet as Somalis.

This does not mean that Somalis are hostile towards outsiders. However, as Samatar explained: If refugee status was the only factor that informed their community building efforts, they would also have united with refugees from other countries such as Sudan and Ethiopia.<sup>226</sup> It should also be considered that many of the CBO members I met had arrived in Cairo fairly recently and were not able to speak or read Arabic yet. For those who have been

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<sup>223</sup>Focus group with CBO members of the Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi.

<sup>224</sup>Dahabo, interview by author, SAFWAC center, March 6, 2013; Siman, interview by author, Siman’s home, November 19, 2013.

<sup>225</sup>Focus group with CBO members of SAFWAC, discussion led by author, SAFWAC center, December 14, 2013; Focus group with CBO members of the Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi, Somali community center in Hadayek el Maadi, discussion led by author, November 14, 2013.

<sup>226</sup>Samatar.

living in Cairo much longer it is certainly much easier to interact with non-Somalis, as they are usually fluent in Arabic.

My observations are in accordance with Al-Sharmani's argument that *soomaalinimo* constitute one source of identity construction and "diasporic consciousness."<sup>227</sup> On one hand, it provides a means of unity for Somalis. On the other hand, Somalis' effort to create cohesion and collective welfare "becomes a way of distancing themselves from the anarchy and violence of the homeland and demonstrating to others their claims to '*soomaalinimo*'."<sup>228</sup> Farhan explained that *soomaalinimo* in Egypt was different from back home. For him, it was linked to the desire of being together, not being a refugee or foreigner anymore.<sup>229</sup> Cilmi described to me, that in Egypt where Somalis were foreigners and faced many problems, *soomaalinimo* created cohesion.<sup>230</sup> Samatar stressed that if Somalis' were not in need of assistance, they might not have united in the way they have done.<sup>231</sup>

These statements reveal an interesting point. Refugees gathering together under the shared Somali identity can be seen as a way of refuting or resisting the refugee category at the same time as the community building activity is based on being-Somali-in-Cairo. Somalis are coming together across clans to form a community because they are in exile and are seeking other Somalis, and in doing so, they are able to resist the refugee category, through no longer feeling displaced. Not only do Farhan's and Cimli's statements express resistance, but also a longing for security, for a sense of belonging to mitigate insecurity and displacement.

What comes to the fore is that *soomaalinimo* becomes linked to the experience of exile. Thereby, meaning of *soomaalinimo* undergoes transformations, attaining new or different meanings through experiences in exile. Hall describes identity "as a 'production'

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<sup>227</sup> Al-Sharmani, "Refugees and Citizens," 225.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> Farhan.

<sup>230</sup> Cilmi.

<sup>231</sup> Samatar.

which is never complete, always in process.”<sup>232</sup> It is “a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation.”<sup>233</sup> In line with Malkki’s conceptualization of ‘becoming’ refugee, we can identify a kind of ‘becoming’ Somali. This does not mean that Somalis did not identify themselves as Somalis before. *Soomaalinimo* entails the past and the present, whereby perceptions of what it means changes and take different forms. ‘Becoming refugee’ and ‘becoming Somali’ are, thereby, intertwined influencing one another.

It is, hereby, interesting to note that not only those with official asylum or refugee status, but also respondents with student and émigré status engaged in a discourse of mutual support among Somalis as a result of exile and the given difficult circumstances. It demonstrates a possible identification with the refugee label across legal categories (refugee, student, émigré). Even though students and migrants might not necessarily feel the same legal and socio-economic pressures as refugees do, their empathy for their Somali compatriots and their commitment to help those who are more vulnerable and needy may create connections for a common identity as a diaspora. On the one hand, the building of Somali CBOs and the practices tied to them, are rooted the interrelation between a conceptual homeland and experiences of displacement, flight and exile that contribute to the formation of diasporic identities and community formations.<sup>234</sup> On the other hand, these activities reveal that diaspora goes beyond the mere identification of a bounded group, but express a “category of practice, project, claim and stance.”<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>232</sup>Stuart Hall, “Culture and Diaspora,” in *Colonial Discourse & Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 392.

<sup>233</sup>*Ibid.*, 394.

<sup>234</sup>Griffiths, *Somali and Kurdish Refugees*, 26.

<sup>235</sup>Rogers Brubaker, “The ‘Diaspora’ Diaspora,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28, no. 1 (2005): 13.

understanding of *soommaalino* among all Somalis.<sup>236</sup> Indeed, Cilmi stressed that Somalis had different perceptions of what it means. This certainly applies to notions of *soomaalino* in the past as well as new understandings in the present. Moreover, common trajectories of identity construction and community formation should not be exaggerated to a harmonized and idealized image of *the* Somali diaspora. This would trap us in the problematic notion of the homogenous refugee community I discussed in Chapter 1. My research respondents did not give me much insight into possible conflicts and frictions among Somalis other than some general notions of the problem that clan differences can sometimes generate. However, through my work with Somali unaccompanied minors, I am well aware that clan can create power relations between minority and majority clans, though this should not be generalized either. Additionally, I once met a young Somali woman who disclosed to me that she avoided any connections with the Somali center in Maadi, not because she had anything against someone there personally, but because she despised the centrality of clan in Somalis' behaviors judgments towards others in general.

Another aspect of community that leaped out at me among respondents in Maadi was their spatially-bound understanding of it. When I asked research participants to tell me how they understood the concept of 'community' both CBO members and leaders at the Somali center in Maadi frequently defined community as living together or coming together in the same place.<sup>237</sup> It highlights the feeling of cohesion between Somalis in the neighborhood and demonstrates that their residence in the neighborhood far away from other Somalis plays a role as well. This emphasis on place was, especially, interesting in that they provided these definitions when I asked about community in general without linking it to the CBO.

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<sup>236</sup>Ibid., 43.

<sup>237</sup>Focus group with CBO leaders of the Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi, discussion led by author, Somali community center in Maadi, September 29, 2013; Focus group with CBO members of the Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi; Cilmi; Ladan.

The spatially-bound understanding that research respondents in Maadi ascribed to community shows how the wider locality can play into peoples' perception of place as well as notions of inclusion and exclusion.<sup>238</sup> From an urban anthropology perspective, it can be linked to the notion of emplacement. Massey notes concerning place that "you can sense the simultaneous presence of everywhere in the place where you are standing."<sup>239</sup> In an earlier work, she notes: "Places can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings, where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself."<sup>240</sup> The physical space becomes linked to the making of social relationships and networks within a bounded locale. A gendered aspect becomes, thereby apparent when we take into consideration that most Somalis active in the Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi are women who engage in networking to help each other and use the CBO as a place to invest in the creation of these networks. A statement of Samakab gives a glimpse of the CBOs' importance as spaces for place-making which is, again, tied to the notion of *soomaalinimo*. When asking him about the role of the CBO in Hadayek el Maadi with respect to *soomaalinimo*, Samakab said: "We come here all as Somalis. If we were different nations in one place we could not come together as we are now."<sup>241</sup>

In this section, I have meant to show that multiple elements can nurture Somalis' identity. Identities are produced and reproduced, transformed and retransformed through common histories and experiences, feelings of social constraints of exile and displacement, imaginations of togetherness and community, place-making, daily practices of networking and survival etc. They can, thereby, be seen as markers on which community formation is based.

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<sup>238</sup> Spicer, "Places of Exclusion and Inclusion."

<sup>239</sup> Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 162.

<sup>240</sup> Doreen Massey, "A Global Sense of Place," *Marxism Today* (June 1991): 28.

<sup>241</sup> Samakab.



## **4.2 Community Construction & Place-Making – Somehow Similar, Somehow Different**

One general outcome of my research is that both CBOs play a role in fostering community cohesion. Spending hours in both CBOs over the course of four months enabled me to observe how CBO members interacted with each other, giving me a glimpse of the atmosphere of both places. Thereby, certain differences came to the fore which can be related to the different dynamics and structures of the two CBOs, affecting how CBO members relate to the CBO as well as toward each other. In addition, both the CBOs as places in itself as well as their location within Cairo becomes of relevance, the latter revealing the possible influence of the local context on people and places within it.

Both CBOs were created to open up a space for Somalis. The purpose in each case was, however, slightly different. In Nasr City, numerous Somali cafés and restaurants exist which give Somalis (mainly men though) possibilities to meet and socialize. It reveals that many existing informal sites for networking and socializing outside the framework of the CBOs are primarily dominated by men, or only open to men, and certainly not to single women. The Egyptian-Somali organization ESD has been providing services and educational opportunities in the area. However, the group of Somali female students created SAFWAC because there was, firstly, a lack of space particularly serving women and children and, secondly, because they saw a center helping them realize and promote their ideas to support Somali women. In Hadayek el Maadi, on the other hand, there are no Somali cafés, but men are able to frequent the local Egyptian cafés. Again, these places are not considered acceptable for women to meet. Nor was there an organization serving refugees. Tadamon did not have an office in that area at the time Somalis from the neighborhood launched their center. Somalis were poorly connected with one another and lacked any space to congregate. Overall, both CBOs filled the gap of providing spaces for Somalis, especially women, to

meet. However, the gaps they filled apart from that are slightly different which can be traced back to the differing purposes for which they were created in the first place.

Another aspect in understanding the internal dynamics of the two CBOs can be derived from the concept of ‘assemblage’ which has its origin in Latour’s actor-network-theory (ANT). The latter postulates that groupings – as opposed to ‘groups’ which bear misleading connotations of stability for Latour – “have constantly to be made, or remade”<sup>242</sup> in order to continue existing. Groupings are not kept together by a “big reassuring pot of glue.”<sup>243</sup> The means (e.g. certain practices) through which social connections are made and re-made and groups delineated are, thereby, rarely stable. More often than not, they may “transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry.”<sup>244</sup> While this seems to render any analysis of social group formation a complex and confusing undertaking, it also allows us to understand members of such groups (or ‘groupings’ in Latour’s vocabulary) of having more “leeway in defining themselves.”<sup>245</sup>

This complex understanding of ANT also informs the concept of assemblage. According to Cochrane, assemblage considers the multiple ways “in which meanings (and projects) are constructed through negotiated practices between agents of one sort and another.”<sup>246</sup> Far from being discretely bounded, structured and stable, assemblages are based on ephemeral, evanescent, and heterogeneous social processes, thus undermining claims of structured and stable socio-cultural groups and societies. According to Marcus and Saka, assemblage is often used in two different analytical ways. On the one hand, it refers a subjective experiencing, cognition and imagining of society and culture in a certain time span. On the other hand, it is applied to the analysis of social and material relations as a

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<sup>242</sup>Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 34.

<sup>243</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>244</sup>*Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>245</sup>*Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>246</sup>Allan Cochrane, ‘Spatial Divisions and Regional Assemblages,’ in *Spatial Politics: Essays for Doreen Massey*, ed. David Featherstone and Joe Painter (South Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 90.

“describable product of emergent social conditions, a configuration of relationships among diverse sites and things.”<sup>247</sup>

Both pathways of using assemblage can help us in understanding subjective experiences and social relations within SAFWAC and the Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi. However, it should have become clear by now that when I describe some activities within the two CBOs in the following, these must be understood as specific practices in a specific moment of time; not as stable continuities, but contingencies of possibilities. Still, the description of activities provide a glimpse in how practices of community formation can manifest themselves in multiple ways in a specific time (2013-2014) and place (two *Somali* CBOs).

#### 4.2.1 SAFWAC

In a way, SAFWAC seems to have the character of an educational center, though not exclusively. The curriculum of courses structures the day within the center. During my observations I could, however, observe differences in the delivery of courses. Arabic courses, for instance, were run by an Egyptian teacher and structured like school classes with him standing at a whiteboard and students sitting at desks following his instructions. The same nature of discipline and school-class character could be observed during the English classes, run by a Somali volunteer, and during the computer courses, held in the common room over a projector.

Other courses were, on the other hand, more loosely structured. During the tailoring classes, for instance, the teacher, a Palestinian woman, practiced with the students how to create clothes. However, many Somali women often started chatting and laughing on the side, thereby sometimes hardly concentrating on what their teacher or fellow student was doing. The crochet course consisted of a Somali teacher (one of the CBO leaders) and three to four

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<sup>247</sup>George E. Marcus and Erkan Saka, “Assemblage,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 23, no. 2–3 (2006): 102.

Somali students. They sat together wherever there was space at the time of their meeting; sometimes in the common room, at other times in one of the class rooms. Here, I had even more the impression that the time of class was an opportunity for the women to socialize and talk *alongside* working on their handicrafts. This obviously serves a very strong community-building and psychosocial function, perhaps more valuable than the crochet or sewing class content themselves.

There were many other things happening around these classes that added more to the place than educational purposes. I had the privilege to see how over the course of a day, Somali women of various age would sit together before their classes started to practice Arabic, English or the Quran together, to present to one another their latest tailoring or just to chat and spend time together. One day, one of the CBO leaders cooked a meal in the early afternoon for those Somali women who had not eaten anything since morning. Both leaders and students frequently made tea for themselves and others. When it was time for prayer, the women would roll out a big carpet in the common room and pray together. Watching them standing next to each other side by side, making sure that no one was left behind alone in the last row, were moments for me in which I somehow felt what CBO participants were themselves telling me.

For all CBO students at SAFWAC who I interviewed the center was not only an opportunity to study, but also a place for women to socialize. Ubax and Caaisho, two Somali students at SAFWAC, stressed how Somali women were often sitting alone at home or only met on the market as they were lacking opportunities to meet outside homes. The center gave them the space to meet other women, to learn together, to make friendships and to help each other.<sup>248</sup> Ubax used a beautiful expression: “SAFWAC brings Somalis from dark into light by

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<sup>248</sup>Caaisho, interview by author, SAFWAC center, March 6, 2013; Ubax, interview by author, SAFWAC center, March 6, 2013.

providing us education and a space to socialize.”<sup>249</sup> In a similar vein, Faadi, one of the CBO leaders, described the center metaphorically as a “little Somalia” where people of different background and regional origin who share some common circumstances become part of a family and where she is able “to breathe” without having to fear to be judged by others.<sup>250</sup>

The statements exemplify for me that both CBO leaders and members perceive the center to be a safe space where they can feel comfortable and socialize *in addition* to pursuing their aim of receiving or providing education. Hammond proffers the concept of ‘emplacement’ by which people may “set about transforming an unknown and anonymous space into a personalized place and finally into a “home.””<sup>251</sup> An understanding of emplacement, thereby, calls attention to how activities are enacted within the physical space of SAFWAC. Connecting this to my earlier discussion on assemblage, seemingly mundane activities of tea making, socializing, and praying may be understood to gain a deeper meaning for the Somalis who construct and negotiate these practices together and, in this way, produce feelings of togetherness among each other. Moreover, notions of emplacement can also be discerned in Faadi’s comparison of SAFWAC as a little Somalia. It expresses feelings of nostalgia about a homeland that does largely not exist in such a peaceful sense as the center does and, being born outside Somalia, in which she has never been herself. It is in line with Hall’s argument of the performativity of identity, and in this way also of community, making.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>249</sup>Ubax.

<sup>250</sup>Faadi.

<sup>251</sup>Hammond, *This Place Will Become Home*, 3.

<sup>252</sup>Hall, “Culture and Diaspora,” 392-94.

#### 4.2.2 Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi

For Somalis in Hadayek el Maadi, one of the main benefits CBO members attached to the place was the opportunity to learn something, and to come together and socialize.<sup>253</sup> In this sense, community formation through common goals and interests was not very different from SAFWAC. However, unlike the latter, I would describe the place in Maadi much more as a Somali neighborhood cooperative. The name itself, ‘the Somali *Community* in Hadayek el Maadi,’ underlines this. They did not include the word ‘association’ as the founders of SAFWAC did. Instead, they called themselves a community. The fact that they used the word ‘community’ in their name reflects their understanding of themselves as a community, and the CBOs as a place to enact this community.

The place of the Somali community center in Maadi is only about one third the size of the SAFWAC center. Maybe it is this narrowness of space combined with the behavior of the people within it that created this special coziness which I felt so often when I was there. Usually every Thursday and Friday afternoon, CBO leaders and members, the latter mainly women, mingle in the limited confines of their center. I tried to find out while apart from the male CBO leaders, I hardly saw male Somalis at the center. On the one hand, the majority of Somalis in the neighborhood are women. On the other hand, Somali men were mainly taking part in playing football and there were separate Quran lessons for men.<sup>254</sup> Hence, the crochet class (obviously considered an activity for women, not for men), and the Quran lessons were times for women to meet and study together. The fact that women cannot go to cafés unlike men might play a role as well. A cultural aspect of acceptance might play a role as well. Male CBO leaders were generally sitting in the room with women. It was, however, interesting to observe that when the room was full of women, some men who came by to talk to Cilmi or

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<sup>253</sup> Alemo, interview by author, café in Sakanat Maadi, November 1, 2013; Feynuus, interview by author, Somali community center in Hadayek el Maadi, November 13, 2013; Shamso, interview by author, Somali community center in Hadayek el Maadi, November 28, 2013; Xirsi, interview by author, Somali community center in Maadi, November 8, 2013; Ladan.

<sup>254</sup> Cilmi; Samatar.

Samakab would pass quickly through the room to the back office without spending much time in the front room.

The women came to study – English, Somali, Arabic and Quran – or to do handicrafts. Compared to SAFWAC, the classes are much less structured. Classes may or may not take place; students might or might not come, either because women had to work or were busy with something else on that day, or because their teacher was prevented for any reason. Samakab, for instance, a psychosocial worker at PSTIC, sometimes had to cancel Somali class when he was busy assisting someone in the community.

The teachers are mainly from within the community, working on a voluntary basis, and not always having established clearly structured curricula. So far, they were only once able to afford hiring a woman from All Saints Cathedral to give crochet class for a couple of month in 2013, her salary paid with a small grant they had attained from Tadamon. In addition, a friend from France and I taught English to a couple of Somali men and women on a voluntary basis between September and December 2013. Both activities have been taken over by Somali CBO leaders in the beginning of 2014 to ensure their continuation.

It is worth describing a typical afternoon in the CBO to convey what I mean by arguing that the CBO seems to more akin to a neighborhood society or social club – one could even say with a ‘living-room’ character – rather than an educational center. Usually every Thursday afternoon around 4 p.m., women arrive in dribs and drabs, receiving one another with cheers, and joining those who have come earlier to take English lessons. Sooner or later, they pull out their handicrafts, starting to work on it and chatting in a lively way with one another. Other women, who just finished their English class, join them with their handicrafts, just sit around, or go home to collect their exercise books for the upcoming Quran lesson. The crochet teacher, an Eritrean woman, often just blends into the group,

attending to her students only whenever they need help. Filsan, the youngest female CBO leader, usually assists her.

Cilmi and Samatar (either one of them or both) are usually present, either spending time with the women in the common room or sitting in the back office. Often, Samakab, drops in later in the afternoon. Every now and then, Somali men or women come by to talk to one of the CBO leaders. Sometimes, Cilmi or Samakab leave to assist a Somali in the community.

When the Quran lesson is approaching, some women put aside their handicraft work and pull out their Quran exercise books to start practicing verses, either alone or in pairs. Crochet and the melodic citing of the Quran go hand in hand. For me, those hours of handicraft left the impression of being much more time of socializing for the women rather than a serious course. When the Quran teacher, Warsame, finally arrives, the women start to become much more serious about paying attention. Warsame usually holds the Quran lesson in the back office. A group of women sits with him in the room waiting for their turn to be called to the desk to practice their verses. While waiting, they practice on their own or with the person sitting next to them. Those women, who do not fit into the office room, wait outside, practicing the Quran or something else, just chatting or cleaning up the rooms. The Quran lessons often last until 9 or 10 p.m. after which the doors of the CBO are finally closed and the women go to their homes in the neighborhood.

Since its establishment, the CBO has had an immense impact in connecting Somalis. As several CBO leaders stressed, the main problem for Somalis in Hadayek el Maadi prior to the existence of the office was the lack of communication and connectedness among them. Since then, the center has made efforts to collect the contact details of Somalis living in the neighborhood and to make them aware of their office. Cilmi estimated that they were now



able to get in touch with some 85 percent of the Somali population living around.<sup>255</sup> The initial aim of establishing an office-base was, hence, to provide a platform that would bring Somalis from *within* the neighborhood closer together. Several CBO members in Maadi recited two Somali proverbs to explain to me why the CBO was created. One proverb (*Gacmowadajirbay wax kugayaan*) can be translated into ‘when hands come together, they can do more.’ The other one literally translated as ‘one finger cannot wash the whole face’ (*Falkaliyi fool madhaqd.*) equally means that one can achieve more in a group than on one’s own.<sup>256</sup> The Somali population in Hadayek el Maadi is small. Ard el-Liwa and Nasr City, the two areas with the largest populations of Somalis, are far away and require long journeys to reach them. In this sense, Hadayek el Maadi constitutes a small remote enclave of Somalis, embedded within a majorly Egyptian- and partially Sudanese-dominated neighborhood.

The way research participants talked about the CBO and its impact also conveys a sense of community feeling that emphasizes its embeddedness in the particular neighborhood. Siman, a 40-year-old Somali woman, underlined the close relationship between Somalis in the neighborhood with everyone knowing what the other was doing. She praised how Somalis visited each other when one of them became sick and how she could rely on her Somali neighbors to help her look after her disabled niece. In her view, the CBO was created to “help the community.”<sup>257</sup> Similarly, Alemo, a female unaccompanied minor, used the formulation “our community” when explaining to me how Somalis in the neighborhood knew and helped each other. She joined the CBO in order to be able to receive help when facing problems.<sup>258</sup> Caaliyah, a female CBO member, stressed that they formed a “community in Maadi.” She and two other young women, Ladan and Feynuus, agreed during a focus group discussion

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<sup>255</sup> Cilmi.

<sup>256</sup> Focus group with CBO members of the Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi.

<sup>257</sup> Siman.

<sup>258</sup> Alemo.

that they were different from “other communities” and that they were responsible “here” for their community activities.<sup>259</sup>

This does not mean that Somalis in Maadi felt completely disconnected from other Somalis outside the neighborhood. For instance, when talking about challenges they faced, they were often talking about the problems of Somali refugees as a whole (not only in Maadi). Moreover, in their descriptions of how they understood *soomaalinimo* they were expressing the common characteristics of originating from one place as well as sharing the same language and customs.<sup>260</sup> They perceived the CBO to foster *soomaalinimo* in general by tying Somalis together and creating bonds. Nonetheless, unlike Somalis at SAFWAC, many of them brought up the dimension of the neighborhood when defining community and the role of their CBO. This becomes also apparent in the fact that Somalis within the neighborhood who do not regularly come to the CBOs were equally considered part of the CBO if they somehow have connections to it.<sup>261</sup>

Nonetheless, Somali respondents in Maadi had a much more spatially-bound perception of “community”, which was that of their immediate neighborhood. Perhaps also given that there are no other sites of Somali community in this area (other Somali CBOs or cafés) they felt that their center is central gathering point for the community in the neighborhood. The notion of emplacement becomes relevant here as well. Emplacement forms the basis for CBO members’ activities and community identity. Community cohesion among Somalis is, thereby, constructed and fostered within the neighborhood through mutual support among Somalis from the neighborhood and participation in activities organized within the CBOs. While similar practices of emplacement also take place among members in SAFWAC, in the case of Somalis in Maadi, their separation from larger populations of Somalis within the city seems to make the neighborhood an additional component. The CBO

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<sup>259</sup>Focus group with CBO members of the Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi.

<sup>260</sup>Ladan; Feynuus, Siman.

<sup>261</sup>Filsan.

as a place constitutes a building block for emplacement of Somalis *living in the neighborhood*.

### **4.3 Agency within the Somali CBOs – Ability, Perceptions, Motivations**

Another aspect of my research focuses on how agency unfolds among different CBO actors (leaders and members). In this section, I will look at some of the reasons and motivations that underlie people's ability and willingness to become active. In the subsequent section, I will discuss how the structures of, and dynamics within, the CBOs can impact on its members' inclusion into decision-making mechanisms as well as their perception to take a role in it. This does not only reveal different kind of agencies, but can also explain differing natures of community formation in each CBO.

As emphasized in Chapter 1, agency is informed by different individual and structural forces and conditions. People's livelihood opportunities are circumscribed, on the one hand, by people's individual skills, abilities, available resources and networks and, on the other hand, by the 'vulnerability context' which is determined by contextual factors such as policies, institutions and socio-economic conditions.<sup>262</sup> Moreover, agency is dependent on the availability of resources.<sup>263</sup> Lack of capabilities and resources (including time) and difficult circumstances produced by structural conditions can, hence, constrain people's ability to exert agency.

The CBOs can be seen as places in which Somalis can mitigate vulnerabilities and gain opportunities for agency, collectively through joint practices and individually by acquiring skills and knowledge that can empower them in negotiating their lives in Egypt (e.g. by learning Arabic or receiving information about services in Egypt available to them). In this respect, the saving project at SAFWAC bears an interesting aspect. Women can take

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<sup>262</sup>Jacobsen, "Refugees in Urban Areas."

<sup>263</sup>Kabeer, *Resources, Agency, Achievement*, 348.

control over their savings, support other participants by allowing them to borrow a larger amount of money in times of need, or ask for a loan themselves. On the one hand, saving initiatives that are common among refugees and migrants at the informal level outside organizations become more institutionalized by being incorporated into the organizational structures of SAFWAC. On the other hand, SAFWAC leaders only manage the bookkeeping, but it is saving participants themselves who take control over making decisions of how the money is used.<sup>264</sup>

However, personal circumstances can also constrain agency within the CBOs. Refugees who find themselves in a vulnerable position might, for example, be less inclined or able to become active in the CBOs even if the CBO's existence has positive spill-over effects for them. Siman, for instance, has to care for her disabled niece who needs full-time care and, thus, is hardly able to come to the CBO.<sup>265</sup> Moreover, many Somali women in Maadi work as house maids and only get a day off from work every two weeks which, as Samakab explained to me, does not allow them to take part in the CBOs activities regularly.<sup>266</sup> Warsame, a student from Somaliland, told me how he was not able to invest time into the CBO establishment because of his commitment at university, but started to teach the Quran once he finished his degree.<sup>267</sup> Becoming active as CBO leaders, as I observed and was told, can also be very energy- and time-consuming. Whenever, I was at the CBO in Maadi, for instance, Cilmi was almost always present. He and Samakab both complained that their position in the community was sometimes burdening and did not allow for much time to pursue other personal interests. Cilmi mentioned how he wished he was sometimes regarded as a 'normal member' since his engagement in the CBO did not even allow him to find employment.

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<sup>264</sup>Nastexa.

<sup>265</sup>Siman.

<sup>266</sup>Samakab.

<sup>267</sup>Warsame.

However, Samakab also said that he would probably be approached as much by Somalis for assistance even without the existence of the CBO.<sup>268</sup>

Factors that seem to promote the key position of CBO leaders both at SAFWAC and in Maadi include their length of stay in Cairo, their ability to speak Arabic, their level of education, their current profession, and their prior status in the community based on their previous community work. Most of the SAFWAC leaders, for instance, are university students or graduates, speak Arabic fluently, and some work at PSTIC, MSF or AMERA. Many of the CBO leaders both at SAFWAC and in the Somali center in Maadi had been active in community work prior to the opening of the centers.<sup>269</sup> CBO members at the Somali center in Maadi often turn to Cilmi and Samakab for help, as they speak Arabic and know the institutional pathways of service providers such as Caritas and UNHCR. The same is true in the case of SAFWAC Somali women seek advice from Nastexa, the President, or other CBO leaders like Farhan who is working for PSTIC.

Two points can be raised here. Firstly, linked to Bandura's conceptualizations of agency, those who are in a less capable position to negotiate their lives in Cairo and, therefore, seek help from those who have more skills or power in accessing services and achieving desired goals, exert what Bandura calls 'proxy agency.'<sup>270</sup> Secondly, the positioning of CBO members can be linked to Bourdieu's concept of 'symbolic power.'<sup>271</sup> Both in the case of SAFWAC and the CBO in Maadi, CBO members frequently praised their leaders for their commitment and help.<sup>272</sup> Somali correspondents in Maadi, especially, frequently mentioned Cilmi and Samakab (as opposed to other CBO leaders), perceiving them as main figures who help them and run the organization.<sup>273</sup> In a way, this can be

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<sup>268</sup>Samakab.

<sup>269</sup>Cilmi; Frahan; Khadra; Nasro; Nastexa; Samakab; Xoriyo.

<sup>270</sup>Bandura, "Exercise of Human Agency," 75.

<sup>271</sup>Bourdieu, *Symbolic Power*.

<sup>272</sup>Feynuus; Siman; Xirsi.

<sup>273</sup>Ladan; Feynuus; Xirsi.

described as an act of legitimizing CBO leaders' symbolic power to act as key agents in the CBO. In Maadi, this is enhanced by the fact that CBO leaders are voted into their positions.

CBO leaders' skills and knowledge, and in the case of SAFWAC maybe even their position as students, might explain, at least partially, why CBO members give their CBO leaders authority, or at least accept their authority, to run the CBOs and to represent them. Even if some CBO leaders, like Cilmi, do not always desire to have such a key role in the community, he is elevated to his position because of his ability to speak Arabic and to assist Somalis to access services like Caritas.<sup>274</sup> Xoriyo also explained to me that she took on the position as a Vice President at the Somali center in Maadi not because she solicited it herself, but because she was considered most suitable for it.<sup>275</sup>

Before describing how CBO members have become involved in the running and decision-making processes of each CBO, I want to refer to some of the motivations that CBO leaders and volunteers listed when asking them for the reasons why they were involved in the CBO. Some of the answers that I was given resonate with Bandura's concept of self-efficacy<sup>276</sup> as well as Tomlinson's observation of female refugees' desire to give back and help others through volunteer work.<sup>277</sup> Xoriyo, for instance, stressed that she was helping because she was in the position to do so.<sup>278</sup> Together with Cilmi, Samakab and Samatar, she started the CBO because they saw a need to help other community members. Cilmi and Samakab mentioned that their ability to speak Arabic enabled them to facilitate interpretation for Somalis.<sup>279</sup> Salma responded that she wanted to use her education to help other people.<sup>280</sup>

The statements indicate that respondents felt not only confident in their ability to help, but also a need to give back. They simultaneously confirm and deny the refugee category in

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<sup>274</sup>Cilmi.

<sup>275</sup>Xoriyo.

<sup>276</sup>Bandura, "Exercise of Human Agency."

<sup>277</sup>Tomlinson, "Marking Difference."

<sup>278</sup>Xoriyo.

<sup>279</sup>Cilmi, Samakab.

<sup>280</sup>Salma.

that they know the experience of exile and the suffering of refugees, but at the same time in becoming one who ‘gives back’ and volunteers for the community, they position themselves as someone who ‘helps’ rather than is just ‘helped’. In a way, these acts can be understood as a subversion of given structures as conceptualized by Butler.<sup>281</sup> They defy the common notion of refugees as helpless, and break with the reiteration of practices of refugees as receivers of help from humanitarian actors. As such they challenge this categorization by being ‘helpers’ as individuals, and – in a wider sense – as a collective, the community is ‘helping themselves.’ CBOs, thus, become sites for alternative practices of empowerment and support.

CBO leaders’ motivations to become active as volunteers in the CBOs do not only derive from a feeling of duty, responsibility or altruism. For the Somali students who created SAFWAC, the establishment of the center is a way to achieve their own goals and visions of supporting Somali women. Khadra mentioned *soomaalinimo* and Salma the aim to unite Somalis in Egypt so as to overcome divisions that fuelled the conflict in Somalia.<sup>282</sup> Some also expressed feelings of joy and pride when being able to help others and seeing students thrive through what they learn.<sup>283</sup> All these motives can be linked to Kabeer’s definition of agency as comprising not only actions, but also their sense of agency or “the meaning, motivation and purpose which individuals bring to their activity.”<sup>284</sup> CBO leaders derived their motivation from their aim to generate some form of change and, consequently, acted upon it.

In addition, many of the CBO leaders at SAFWAC having studied or studying in the fields of sociology, social work, psychology and child development, volunteering at SAFWAC provides them not only with a platform to use their education for the benefit of

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<sup>281</sup>Judith Butler, *Precarious Life*, 45; Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*.

<sup>282</sup>Khadra; Salma.

<sup>283</sup>Diric, interview by author, SAFWAC center, November 25, 2013; Farhan, Filsan, Salma.

<sup>284</sup>Kabeer, “Resources, Agency Achievements,” 438.

others, but also to gain work experience and to put what they have learned into practice.<sup>285</sup> Furthermore, Nastexa was inspired to create SAFWAC through her attendance of lectures given by educated women at the Somali Student Union or the American University in Cairo.<sup>286</sup> For Faadi, in turn, Nastexa constituted a role model and source of inspiration.<sup>287</sup> Nasro, who knows the Quran by heart, stressed that her Muslim values guided her to volunteer which she had been doing since her childhood.<sup>288</sup> While these sources of motivation are not all driven by religion, they can be related to Hafez's concept of self-care and Mahmood's concept of the docile agent both of which imply women's empowerment being derived from their search for a cultivation of their selves through religious practice. Foucault equally proffers greater perfection or purity of the self as goals of such self-care.<sup>289</sup>

#### **4.4 Agency within the CBOs – Structures & Decision-Making**

Another aspect to address when looking at agency within CBOs is the extent to which the management structures inform CBO leaders' and members' ability as well as their perceptions to be in a position to act and influence decisions within the CBOs. In both SAFWAC and the Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi, committees comprised of all CBO leaders take the lead decisions over the running of the CBOs. The committee at SAFWAC is comprised of eleven members, some of whom were involved in the establishment of the CBOs, others having joined later. Nastexa, one of the founders, is the President. As explained in Chapter 3, each committee member has specific tasks he or she is responsible for. Except for one woman, all committee members are former or current students. The committee usually meets twice a month to discuss issues of concern. They

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<sup>285</sup>Salma.

<sup>286</sup>Nastexa.

<sup>287</sup>Faadi.

<sup>288</sup>Nasro.

<sup>289</sup>Hafez, "Terms of Empowerment"; Mahmood, "Docile Agent"; Michel Foucault, *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, eds. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988).



establish the course curriculum and run all administrative tasks. Meetings with other CBO members are convened when issues need to be discussed in a collective.<sup>290</sup> During the final phase of my field research between February and March 2014, they were in the process of drafting new guidelines for SAFWAC. I cannot say at this point to what extent CBO members might be consulted with regard to the establishment of guidelines.

At the Somali CBO in Maadi, the CBO leadership has been expanding over time, as explained in Chapter 4. While at SAFWAC, only one CBO member, who became connected to the CBO as a student, is part of the committee, CBO leaders in Maadi have been keen to include more and more CBO members into the committee over time. Samakab actually stressed that they were trying to expand the number of CBO leaders and distribute tasks among members in order to ease the burden for each individual CBO leader.<sup>291</sup> Moreover, unlike at SAFWAC, community meetings with all members are held on a more or less regular basis, usually every second Friday. Hence, the CBO in Maadi turns out to be more inclusive in trying to engage CBO members in management and decision-making processes.

What comes to the fore is that the decision-making structures in Maadi seem more horizontal and those at SAFWAC more vertical. This arguably has an impact on CBO members' perceptions about their flexibility in decision-making and leadership within the CBOs. When asking CBO members at SAFWAC about how they thought they could contribute to SAFWAC, the general response was that they were not able to contribute much apart from helping each other, for example by disseminating information or by supporting sick members.<sup>292</sup> This does not mean that they are agency-less. For instance, when some women wanted to have cooking lessons and the center was lacking a stove they collected money to buy one.<sup>293</sup>

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<sup>290</sup>Salma; Rukia.

<sup>291</sup>Samakab.

<sup>292</sup>Caaisho.

<sup>293</sup>Rukia.

In Maadi, not everyone saw how he or she was able to contribute to the CBO either.<sup>294</sup> However, others like Shamsa and Ladan highlighted that they came together as a community to make decisions and solve conflicts.<sup>295</sup> Indeed, one day in February 2014 when I was visiting the CBO I experienced what this can mean. I was sitting with some leaders and members in the common room when a couple of women arrived. All of a sudden, I found myself in the midst of a community meeting. The woman who had just arrived started a discussion with the CBO leaders. They were upset about the fact that they were not consulted in the appointment of the treasurer who was supposed to be responsible for an emergency fund that Somalis within the neighborhood were planning to create. The CBO leaders acknowledged their mistake though one of them later told me that they had appointed someone on their own because other CBO members just left early on that day.<sup>296</sup> In my ears, their discussion in Somali sounded loud and sometimes even aggressive. However, in the end the protesting women seemed satisfied with the answer of their leaders and the meeting was dissolved. Everyone was amicable towards each other and no cloud of resentment or anger hovered in the air. Another explanation for an enhanced sense of ownership and more horizontal decision-making structures is the fact that every CBO member contributes paying for the rent of the CBO space. Keeping the CBO open is, hence, a collective effort.

For me, these proactive initiatives express a sense of collective ownership over decisions concerning the community and, hence, a form of agency I could not see among CBO members at SAFWAC. I should notice at this point, that I never had the chance to experience a common meeting with CBO members at SAFWAC. Even if they might have taken place and have been initiated by CBO members, I was never invited to one of them or present when they unfolded. Consequently, my comparison is limited in this respect.

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<sup>294</sup>Xirsi.

<sup>295</sup>Shamsa; Ladan.

<sup>296</sup>Personal communication with Samakab, Somali community center in Hadayek el Maadi, February 28, 2014.

However, the fact that at the center in Maadi, such meetings take place regularly, already demonstrate a more inclusive nature of decision-making.

Factors that might explain the different natures of decision-making mechanisms and agency of CBO members might be that SAWFAC is not only more structured, but has also been included under the umbrella of the NGO Tadamon as compared to the Somali center in Maadi. I will come back to this aspect later in Chapter 5. An assumption that can, however, be made at this point is that the formalization of functions seems to lead to the perception of SAWFAC as some kind of mini-NGO and of the Somali center in Maadi as a very local CBO. This inside/outside position can have an influential role in the way the CBOs are run and, as a consequence of this, the agency that CBO members can exert or feel to be able to exert.

The differing ways of how the CBOs were established and for what purpose can be illuminating as well in this regard. The CBO in Maadi was created by Somalis from within the neighborhood to create a common space for gatherings and connection-building. The ownership of the place through collective payment of rent and its character of a neighborhood association or social club might explain the more inclusive character of decision-making. On the other hand, SAWFAC was launched by a group of students to provide help and services to Somali women and children. The more vertical decision making and management structures might actually better serve its purpose. The center provides structured courses throughout the week and is mainly opened for CBO members to attend classes. In addition, the rent being covered by Tadamon, a regular collection of money among CBO members is not necessary. This might have reduced CBO members' perception of entitlement and ownership of decisions pertaining to the CBO. The roles of funding and incorporation into the formal humanitarian regime, and their positive and negative aspects and consequences, will be further discussed in the following chapter.

## 4.5 Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of how community formation and place-making has been taking place in SAFWAC and the Somali center in Maadi correspond with some of the literature I engaged with. Al-Sharmani's argument that daily processes of survival and the searching for livelihood strategies against the background of unfavorable conditions can generate collective identities could be found with regards to why the CBOs were created and how they were used by members.<sup>297</sup> Both at SAFWAC and in Maadi, Somalis take part in the CBOs' activities as they are able to receive educational benefits and to engage in networking. The perceived and actual exclusion that many Somalis feel as a result of their refugee and foreigner status seems to inform their experience of place, as argued by Spicer.<sup>298</sup> The CBOs provide a feeling of inclusion and seem to satisfy their "emotional craving for connections with others."<sup>299</sup> This is not only reflected in the ways CBO members interact with each other and use the place for socializing, but also in their frequent emphases on Somalis' interdependence as a result of their difficult situations and lack of opportunities to build connections outside the CBOs, especially for women. Thereby, a common language, culture and origin seems to create bonds which made interlocutors keen to seek contact with other Somalis rather than refugees in general, producing some kind of "shared notion of togetherness."<sup>300</sup>

The creation of associations takes place within contexts that are premised on mobility (coming to Egypt) and simultaneous forced sedentarism (being stuck in Egypt), fragility and vulnerability. On the one hand, the CBOs can be understood as expressions of practices of emplacement, emerging from social networks that take place in different parts of the city. On the other hand, Somalis express collective agency, by acknowledging that they cannot act

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<sup>297</sup> Al-Sharmani, "Refugees and Citizens," 25.

<sup>298</sup> Spicer, "Places of Exclusion."

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

<sup>300</sup> Farewell and Cole, "Community as Healing," 24.

completely autonomously to reach desired goals, but instead have to “work together to secure what they cannot accomplish on their own.”<sup>301</sup>

If we see the Somali CBO members as potential agents, conditions of possibility that are ascribed through practices, structures and power relations within the CBOs become relevant. We can, hereby, consult the interrelatedness of agency and structures of power relations and authority discussed in Chapter 1. The CBOs provide platforms of agency for CBO members as leaders, decision-makers, teachers, students, and supporters. Somalis’ involvement in the CBOs enables them to perform agency, though in different ways. Whether leading the CBO or coming in order to learn and to meet others and possibly help them to overcome problems demonstrate different forms of agency. They can refute the status of the helpless and dependent refugee, not only by opening up ways of support outside the mainstream service provision sector for refugees, but also by creating new meanings for themselves as part of a collective.

However, the continuous enactment of certain structures and positions, combined with the legitimation through the acceptance of such structures and positions by CBO members, can create internal dynamics that afford different degrees of agency to people within the CBOs, thereby influencing the nature of agency they can exert. Of course, these structures are by no means to be understood as stable, but as being temporarily established through certain practices at a given time, as Latour would remind us.<sup>302</sup> Nor does it mean that alternative practices within established practices, rules and norms are impossible, as Ortner and Butler would suggest to a greater or lesser extent would suggest.<sup>303</sup>

My findings show that the different natures of interaction between members in both CBOs reveal the multilayered complexity of agency, community formation and place-making. CBOs can be seen as assemblages that harbor in themselves multiple milieus for

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<sup>301</sup>Bandura, “Exercise of Human Agency,” 75.

<sup>302</sup>Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 34.

<sup>303</sup>Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 17; Ortner, *Making Gender*, 7.

agency (as leaders, students, volunteers, decision-makers). The decision-making structures of both CBO are, thereby, one such milieu. CBO members at the Somali center in Maadi are more involved in decision-making processes compared to SAFWAC which might be explained by its more horizontal decision-making structures. Structures and practices internal to the CBOs can hence determine their nature as “loc[i] of . . . negotiation over processes of community construction.”<sup>304</sup> These findings urge us to take into consideration not only the local surrounding and contextual conditions, but also the dynamics within CBOs.

A final note I want to make is that many of the Somalis who are actively involved in the day-to-day activities of both CBOs are women. At SAFWAC most leaders are young women and the majority of students are female due to the CBO’s aim of targeting women. In Maadi, it is mainly women who make use of the CBOs. Men hardly take part in the activities run in the center. As a result of patriarchal societal and clan structures and colonial influences, the role of Somali women is generally subordinated to that of men.<sup>305</sup> This does, however, not mean that Somali women are not active participants. Indeed, the Somali female writers Hasan, Adan and Warsame attribute strength and non-submission to Somali women through their tradition of poetry and their creation of informal networks, kinship groups and religious associations to fight oppression, consequently arguing against the notion of feminism as being solely a Western concept.<sup>306</sup> Similarly, Kelly elucidates how Somali women’s organized local groups were able to transcend family, clan and ethnic divisions.<sup>307</sup> Maxamuud criticizes that Somali women’s role in politics is often overlooked. She describes in her essay how educated middle-class women spearheaded the formation of a women’s

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<sup>304</sup>Hammond, *This Place will Become Home*, 9-10.

<sup>305</sup>Al-Sharmani, “Living Transnationally;” Lidwien Kapteijns, “Women and the Crisis of Communal Identity: The Cultural Construction of Gender in Somali History,” in *The Somali Challenge: From Catastrophe to Renewal?*, ed. Ahmed (Samatar Boulder, C.O.: Lynne Rienner, 1994), 221.

<sup>306</sup>Dahabo Farah Hasan, Amina H. Adan, and Amina Mohamoud Warsame, “Somalia: Poetry as Resistance against Colonialism and Patriarchy,” in *Subversive Women: Women's Movements in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean*, ed. Saskia Wieringa (London: Zed Books, 1995).

<sup>307</sup>Hilarie Kelly, “Groups in Reconstruction,” in *Mending Rips in the Sky: Options for Somali Communities in the 21st Century*, eds. Hussien Mohammed Adam and Richard Ford (Red Sea Press, 1997).

movement in Somalia to fight for the social, political, cultural and economic rights of Somali women.<sup>308</sup> In the case of female Somalis in Cairo, we can identify similar performances of agency, either by trying to improve one's position through education or by actively informing the establishment and running of CBOs.

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<sup>308</sup>Yasmeen Maxamuud, "Somali Women: Agents of Change: The Untapped Pedigree of Somali Women's Political Participation," *WardheerNews*, [http://wardheernews.com/Articles\\_2011/Nov/Somali%20Women\\_agents\\_change\\_yasmeen.pdf](http://wardheernews.com/Articles_2011/Nov/Somali%20Women_agents_change_yasmeen.pdf).

## Chapter 5: CBOs in the Cairene Urban Refugee Policy Framework – Opportunities & Challenges

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In a roundtable discussion convened by the International Rescue Committee and the Women's Refugee Commission in November 2012, practitioners, policy-makers and researchers identified social capital and networks to be some of the most valuable potentials that refugee communities bear and that can be leveraged. In this respect, it is argued that “tapping into existing community structures could make programming more effective and reinforce the one factor that researchers have found most relevant for refugees’ success in urban settings – social capital.”<sup>309</sup> Moreover, in a report by the Women's Refugee Commission conducted in Cairo in 2012, recommendations were made to utilize the “unique”<sup>310</sup> number of CBOs in Cairo as sources of information, services, and social protection.

As has been established in the previous chapter, the CBOs constitute nodes for Somalis to network with other Somalis and, in Putnam's conceptualization, to build ‘bonding capital.’ In this chapter, I discuss what roles CBOs do and can play in the framework of urban refugee policies, thereby focusing on their potentials in providing assistance and services for refugees and linkages between refugees and other service providers. Social capital will, thereby, be one approach to analyze ways in which UNHCR and other refugee service providers currently do and could potentially support and work with CBOs. It, thereby, urges us to critically look at how current governmental policies and refugee programming impacts on CBOs, not only with regards to their ability to act as providers of assistance but also concerning their ability to actually survive and exert ownership.

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<sup>309</sup>Eveliina Lyytinen and Jadnosch Kullenberg, “Urban Refugee Research and Social Capital. A Roundtable Report and Literature Review” (analytical report, product of the IRC's and WRC's Urban Refugee Roundtable, 2013), 17.

<sup>310</sup>Rizvi, “Shifting Sands,” 16.



## 5.1 CBOs as Providers of Educational Activities

All CBO members I interviewed at SAFWAC and in Maadi valued the provision of educational activities in the CBOs.<sup>311</sup> At SAFWAC, CBO leaders and volunteers often listed it as one of their greatest achievements and strengths of the CBO to enable Somali women to learn to read and write or to acquire skills that enhance their opportunities to earn money.<sup>312</sup> Learning Arabic was seen as especially beneficial as it promotes Somali women's self-reliance and ability to negotiate their daily lives, may it be to give their signature, to read street signs, to communicate with Egyptians or even to avoid being ripped off in the payment of bills and groceries.<sup>313</sup> Concerning some skills students at SAFWAC learnt, Caaisho mentioned that some became good enough to sell some of their hand-made things or to work as hairdressers and that even if they were not able to sell their handmade products, they would at least be able to do something productive and make gifts for others and things for themselves.<sup>314</sup>

As explained in the previous chapter, SAFWAC has more resources available to run educational programs. At the time of my research, they had different courses running. Some were taught by Somali volunteers and usually for free. For other courses (like Arabic, tailoring and coiffeur) SAFWAC had Tadamon micro-grants available through which they could fund materials or even pay qualified teachers from outside a small salary. For some courses, they also asked students to pay a small fee. The CBO leaders, however, would like to have more funds and a bigger place available in order to be able to offer more courses and run more awareness programs.<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>311</sup>Focus group with CBO members of SAFWAC; Xalwo, interview by author, SAFWAC center, March 6, 2013; Alemo; Caaisho; Caaliyah; Dahabo; Feynuus; Ladan; Shamso; Siman; Ubax; Xirsi.

<sup>312</sup>Nasteha; Salma; Khadra; Frahan; Faadi; Nasro.

<sup>313</sup>Farhan; Nasro; Rukia.

<sup>314</sup>Caaisho.

<sup>315</sup>Farhan; Khadra; Nastexa; Rukia

Demanding course fees or searching for a bigger space seems hardly possible in the Somali center in Maadi where CBO members have to make monthly contributions to rent payment in order to keep the existing center open. The CBO had only acquired one micro-grant in 2013 through which it was able to bring in an outside teacher for crochet. The members were hoping for an approval of two new micro-grants for 2014 at the time of my research. Apart from that, CBO leaders or Somali students have been given courses or took them over when I left (to teach English) or the micro-grant ran out for the crochet course. Educational classes were, however, generally less structured than at SAFWAC. In the Arabic class at SAFWAC, for example, students follow a course book and have to pass final examinations in order to enter the next course level. At the center in Maadi, by contrast, the Arabic alphabet was taught alongside the Quran during the time of my research. The number of Somalis in Maadi who could possibly teach Arabic is small and mostly limited to those who have already other commitments such as their studies, work or their involvement in the CBO by other ways. The CBO would like to offer more classes, but lack of human and financial resources prevents from doing so.

The CBOs provide educational activities at no or only minimal costs. This gives those, who are not able to afford to pay for any education, the opportunity to learn a language or skill and to become productive. While it would be bold to argue that they resist against state control, one can still draw a connection to Zibechi's conceptualization of collective activism of marginalized people in that they create new spaces for themselves in order to improve their lives and resist against their marginalized situation.

There is a weak point, however, to this argument. Sources of funding for educational and vocational training activities are mainly searched through Tadamon micro-grants and not through fundraising among Somalis inside or outside Egypt, as described by Al-Sharmani in

the case of SRCOE, SSRD and ESD.<sup>316</sup> The micro-grants constitute an opportunity for groups and CBOs to implement projects they would otherwise not be able to realize. On the other hand, it certainly creates dependency on humanitarian actors, creating a hierarchical relationship of power in which the donor dominates over the receiver of grants.

The decisions for the distribution of Tadamon grants is made by a committee composed of staff from UNHCR, Tadamon and Terres des Hommes. The UNHCR Senior Community Service Assistant affirmed the process to be fair and to be judged on the basis of the application, not affiliation.<sup>317</sup> Both SAFWAC and the Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi had received each one micro-grant in 2013. At the beginning of March 2014, both CBOs were still waiting for the decision over their new applications for micro-grants which they filed at the end of 2013. SAFWAC has been continuing its programs. However, it is to be questioned how long they can do it without either asking for more fees from participants or finding alternative solutions, especially if they want to keep hiring teachers for a small remuneration. In Maadi, Somali female women have equally been continuing to meet in order to crochet and those more experienced help others to become more skilled in the handicraft. However, the women have to pay for all material expenses by themselves. The Somali community in Maadi has, furthermore, not been able to implement new skills-enhancing projects that entail financial expenses.

While the CBOs realize some educational activities without any funding, they are tied to external aid when it comes to the provision of projects that require money. This dependency of funding weakens the independence of CBOs as alternative spaces of service provision outside the humanitarian regime. It bears the risk of creating institutional relationships that dictate CBOs' possible range of collective agency. If we look at Bourdieu's and Foucault's conceptualization of agency, decisions over designating funds create

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<sup>316</sup> Al-Sharmani, e-mail message to author, April 8, 2014; Al-Sharmani, "Diasporic Somalis in Cairo," 140.

<sup>317</sup> UNHCR Senior Community Service Assistant.

hierarchies of power that enable UNHCR and Tadamon to exert control over CBOs, thereby influencing, at least in part, the position of the CBOs as “agents in a social space.”<sup>318</sup>

## **5.2 CBOs as Providers of Psychosocial Assistance & Nodes of Contact**

Besides offering some educational activities, the CBOs have other functions as well. CBO leaders can use the center instead of going to Somalis’ homes in order to provide Somalis with assistance.<sup>319</sup> Some of the CBO leaders both at SAFWAC and the center in Maadi are psychosocial workers at PSTIC or work at MSF. Farhan and Rukia at SAFWAC, both having received psychosocial training, provide first assessment and assistance for Somalis with psychosocial needs and refer them to appropriate other organizations if necessary.<sup>320</sup> In Maadi, the center makes it easier for Cilmi and Samakab to meet Somalis from the neighborhood. Samakab is himself a PSTIC worker and both he and Cilmi have been assisting Somalis in various matters for years. The center constitutes a contact point for Somalis to meet them. The same is true for Somalis at SAFWAC where I have witnessed several times how Somali women addressed Nastexa and other CBO leaders for help.

Both at SAFWAC and the Somali center in Maadi, Somalis can receive assistance with regards to accessing services of organizations such as UNHCR and Caritas, or accompaniments and help in translation. Ubax told me how in the event that a Somali was in need of financial help in emergency cases, they could address the CBO leaders to ask them for collecting donations from others.<sup>321</sup> SAFWAC also manages a saving cooperative through which Somali women can save money on a monthly basis and borrow from a pool of money without having to pay interest when returning it.<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>318</sup>Bourdieu, “The Social Space,” 724; also Foucault, “The Subject and Power.”

<sup>319</sup>Samakab.

<sup>320</sup>Farhan; Rukia.

<sup>321</sup>Ubax.

<sup>322</sup>Nastexa.

Besides providing direct assistance with accessing services and information, both centers are engaged in raising awareness. SAFWAC uses its premises or open up the space for outside organizations, like MSF and AMERA, or Somali medical students to raise awareness through workshops and presentations in topics such as health care, child rearing, legal issues, Egyptian culture, Somali history or the dangers of illegal migration.<sup>323</sup> In Maadi, CBO leaders equally went to Somali families in the past in order to assess children's, and especially girls', needs and to raise awareness about the importance of schooling.<sup>324</sup> Wabeeri, a Somali medical student, started to offer some basic health check-ups for free at the CBO in Maadi several times per week, including counseling sessions about healthy diet and the handling of health problems such as anemia.<sup>325</sup>

Thirdly, the CBOs engage in advocacy. In 2012, for instance, SAFWAC leaders requested a meeting with UNHCR in order to address problems that Somali women were facing at the time. In the same year, SAFWAC and Somali community leaders from Ard el-Liwa were in negotiated with UNHCR when some Somalis were protesting in front of UNHCR.<sup>326</sup> Hence, CBOs can act as representatives for Somalis.

Acts of demonstrations by Somalis can be seen as acts of agency and resistance against given structural conditions which cannot be further elaborated in this thesis. However, SAFWAC's engagement in advocacy and mediation with UNHCR is interesting in this equation with regards to this thesis topic. Mistrust often reigns among refugees towards UNHCR. Not only in Egypt, but in many other countries, UNHCR has a history of struggling to build sufficiently trustworthy relationships with refugee populations for various reasons.<sup>327</sup>

I cannot confirm to what extent SAFWAC and the community leaders of Ard el-Liwa were

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<sup>323</sup>Ibid.

<sup>324</sup>Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi, "Proposal for Micro-grant."

<sup>325</sup>Wabeeri, interview by author, Somali community center in Hadayek el Maadi, December 10, 2013.

<sup>326</sup>Nasro.

<sup>327</sup>Tricia Hynes, "The Issue of 'Trust' and 'Mistrust' in Research with Refugees: Choices, Caveats and Considerations for Researchers" (working paper no. 98, New Issues in Refugee Research, UNHCR, Geneva, 2003).

recognized by the Somali protestors in 2012 as representatives of them. However, the fact that CBOs are consulted in events like this reveals a change in dynamics and communication when it comes to the management of refugees. On a more negative note, it can mean that UNHCR can circumvent protestors themselves, avoiding talking to protesting refugees face-to-face by approaching CBOs. On a more positive note, CBOs can act as channels of mitigation, and promoters of voices for refugees' needs and demands, their institutionalized formation increasing their leverage in the eyes of UNHCR. With CBOs becoming active in advocacy they can change the political landscape vis-à-vis UNHCR and other organizations and counter tendencies of impersonal population management and bio-politics.

CBOs have the potential to be viable links for UNHCR and other refugee service providers, especially against the background of an urban setting like Cairo where refugees are dispersed and a centralized management of services like in camp settings is unattainable. One aspect is, thereby, organizations' ability to use CBOs as channels to reach out to refugee communities. At both CBOs, information leaflets from UNHCR and other organizations relevant for refugees are sometimes hung up. UNHCR works together with PSTIC and often uses its network of psychosocial workers from within the refugee population as channels of information dissemination.<sup>328</sup>

Hence, PSTIC workers like Farhan and Samakab are able to pass on information from UNHCR or PSTIC. Moreover, NGOs and IOs like UNHCR also use the CBOs to organize workshops and training sessions for CBO leaders and members or to facilitate their own work. In the past, for instance, UNHCR used the facilities of the SAFWAC center to conduct child protection interviews.<sup>329</sup> CRS ran a six month program of after-school-tutoring-classes for children at SAFWAC.<sup>330</sup> When some sixty Somali unaccompanied minors came to the attention of UNHCR after the toppling of Morsi in July 2013 and were referred to AMERA,

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<sup>328</sup>UNHCR Senior Community Service Assistant.

<sup>329</sup>Diric.

<sup>330</sup>Nastexa.

AMERA staff worked together with SAFWAC to contact and meet them at the SAFWAC office.<sup>331</sup> AMERA also uses the SAFWAC center to organize workshops for unaccompanied minors. Tadamon sometimes organizes events in the SAFWAC center.

Nonetheless, the ability of CBOs to engage in advocacy is delimited by UNHCR's degree of seeking contact with refugee communities. The UNHCR Community Service Team is not in regular contact with the Somali community groups unless they request a meeting or UNHCR has a reason to do so. The UNHCR Assistant Community Service Officer counted four meetings with Somali groups for the whole year of 2012, but no meeting with SAFWAC in 2013. It never had a meeting with the Somali center in Maadi so far.<sup>332</sup> Both SAFWAC and the Somali center in Maadi do not have direct contacts in UNHCR.<sup>333</sup> Nasro criticized the slow channels of communication with UNHCR. In cases where a Somali needs immediate help, for example medical assistance, SAFWAC is not able to expect quick responses of UNHCR in order to facilitate and fasten the process of assistance for that person.<sup>334</sup> Samakab criticized UNHCR's lack of outreach as they were not requesting regular meetings with refugee communities anymore as they used to in the past. As he put it, "UNHCR would see much more on the ground if they came into the communities. And if we had meetings we could build trust. UNHCR would see that we are active and community members would see that we are active to advocate for them."<sup>335</sup> AMERA is more active in this regard. Its Somali Community Outreach Officer is usually in regular contact with the CBO leaders to exchange information and up-dates.<sup>336</sup>

Overall, CBOs can be seen as links between refugee service providers and the wider Somali population. To use Putnam's concept, the cooperation between CBOs and

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<sup>331</sup> AMERA Community Outreach Officer.

<sup>332</sup> AMERA Community Outreach Officer.

<sup>333</sup> Cilmi; Nasro.

<sup>334</sup> Nasro.

<sup>335</sup> Samakab.

<sup>336</sup> AMERA Community Outreach Officer; Samakab.

organizations equips both sites with ‘linking capital.’<sup>337</sup> A challenge that remains for CBOs concerns its possible cooperation with Egyptian organizations outside the refugee service provision sector. The example of the Egyptian-Somali organization ESD shows that legal registration opens doors for securing financial resources from or establishing partnerships with local Egyptian organizations. SAFWAC and the Somali center in Maadi are not legally registered as an organization and, hence, not officially recognized by the Egyptian Government. One requirement for registration is the involvement of Egyptians. SAFWAC has started the process of legal registration and is confident in having support of Egyptians who are already involved in some activities to give their signatures.<sup>338</sup> Still, it is a lengthy and bureaucratically demanding process.

Until now, both CBOs have attained some form of legal coverage by being officially part of the legally registered NGO Tadamon (in the case of SAFWAC) or by having obtained a letter from them (in the case of the Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi).<sup>339</sup> However, if they were registered as an Egyptian organization on their own, they would not only enjoy greater legal recognition and protection with regards to their existence and provision of services, but they would also gain greater independence and leeway in working closely together with local Egyptian organizations. In addition – to use Putnam’s concept again – it would open possible doors for creating ‘bridging capital’<sup>340</sup> between the Somali and the host population. This could be of valuable relevance when it comes to the question of fostering dialogue and social integration.

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<sup>337</sup>Putnam, “The Prosperous Community.”

<sup>338</sup>Nastexa.

<sup>339</sup>Nastexa; Samakab.

<sup>340</sup>Putnam, “The Prosperous Community.”



### **5.3 Biases, Ownership & Representation**

Both SAFWAC and the Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi can be described as grassroots projects, having been initiated from Somalis to serve Somalis. Both examples constitute examples of the willingness and cooperativeness of Somalis to collect money in order to create centers, finance facilities or educational activities and help Somalis in need. Moreover, the running of the CBOs is borne by the commitment of volunteers. However, both centers face constraints and limitations that impede their ability to tap their full potential. Examples comprise the financing and running activities, or – as in the case of the Somali center in Maadi – the survival of the center. The CBO in Maadi survives on a shoestring. CBO leaders are not certain how long they will be able to keep the office open and some CBO leaders are thinking about approaching Tadamon to discuss the option of using its space instead of continuing to struggle to keep their own. SAFWAC has the advantage of being part of Tadamon's umbrella organization, easing financial pressures and giving access to a wider network of refugee populations.

In the previous section, I described some forms of cooperation that organizations are already engaging in with CBOs and pointed out existing gaps that organizations like UNHCR could fill. The question arises in what ways organizations could support CBOs, but also how this, in turn, would impact on CBOs' ability to conserve their ownership. In the following section, I will show how certain practices of inclusion and exclusion, promotion and negligence on the part of UNHCR and other organizations can determine CBOs' positioning in the urban refugee policy regime and enable and constrain CBOs' choices and agencies. This, of course, needs to be seen against the background that CBOs are not independent from structural relationships with external actors, as I have discussed earlier with regards to funding.

### *5.3.1 Devaluation of More Loosely Structured CBOs*

I want to start with the observation that, at least in my opinion, SAFWAC receives more attention than the Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi when it comes to assistance and consideration for other things. SAFWAC has been included into the Tadamon framework and, hence, received assistance from UNCHR with regards to rent. The UNHCR Senior Community Service Assistant was not aware of the existence of a Somali CBO in Maadi and perceived Somali in Maadi to be represented by Somali community leaders in Ard el-Liwa. While her ignorance might not apply to all UNHCR staff I was still amazed concerning her position. It is true that the Somali CBO in Maadi has never been requesting any meeting with UNHCR. However, Samakab receives information from UNHCR through PSTIC to disseminate to Somali refugees. AMERA knows about the CBO. UNHCR should do so as well and make efforts to reach out to them.

Moreover, in 2013, AMERA financed a motivational trainer to organize a three-day workshop for SAFWAC upon its request. The SAFWAC leaders received training in motivation skills, the development and management of organizations as well as the establishment of long-term programming strategies and goals. CBO members of the Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi were not invited. Additionally, when an Egyptian private school approached AMERA to be brought in contact with refugee communities to invite them to an event it was organizing to foster inter-cultural exchange, AMERA referred them to SAFWAC.

I want to highlight that it is by no means my intention to discredit SAFWAC to receive unfair treatment. As mentioned several times, SAFWAC's success is based to a large extent on the commitment and competence of its founders and current leaders. When Tadamon searched for a center in Nasr City, they selected SAFWAC instead of opening a separate center because of the positive impression of it. Both the Head of Tadamon and the

UNHCR Senior Community Service Assistant praised the SAFWAC founders for their leadership, their commitment and experience to help others as well as their ability to advocate and find solutions for problems. However, SAFWAC is also in a better position to do certain things, such as running structured activities, because it receives the support, such as rent coverage, that the Somali center in Maadi is deprived of. Organizations active in the field of providing services for refugees seem to pay more attention to organizations such as SAFWAC which are from an institutional point of view better structured and bigger in size. The tendency of external organization to support or, refer outsiders to, SAFWAC rather than smaller groups like Somalis in Maadi might be explainable under the considerations that SAFWAC is structurally more elaborate and institutionalized and that it is located in an area with a much larger population size of Somalis. Still, organizations could do more in incorporating smaller CBOs like the Somali center in Maadi in its support and outreach strategies.

What comes to the fore is that looser organizational structures receive less attention. It closes doors to support viable livelihood structures for refugees in an urban refugee context. The Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi has shown efficacy in creating needed community support for refugees in improving the daily lives of its members. With the help of the creation of a CBO, Somalis in Cairo have managed to establish, by its own means and efforts, a system that enables them to get in touch with a large portion of Somali refugees living in the neighborhood. This an important development, not at least against the background of Cairo's current politically unstable situation, but also in the light of opportunities for UNHCR and other organizations to use such communication channels in a decentralized urban refugee setting like Cairo.

SAFWAC has more the character of a mini-NGO compared to the more local-CBO nature of the Somalis center in Maadi. The impact of so called 'NGO-ization' processes on

women's organizations and social movements have been analyzed by Jad in the case of the Middle East and by Nazneen and Sullan in the case of Bangladesh. Social groups or organizations which adopt a NGO-ization model have the possibility to expand their structures and provide activities. Risks that loom, however, comprise loss of autonomy, dependence on neo-liberal externally-determined top-down agendas, prioritization of accountability towards donors and technocratic proficiency at the expense of initially set agendas, and the establishment of professional cadres.<sup>341</sup> Jad equally refers to the tendency to create isolated temporary projects without taking into consideration the local context and the importance of creating long-term strategies.<sup>342</sup>

It would go beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss tendencies of NGO-ization on the two CBOs under consideration. However, my observations described above have nurtured my impression that UNHCR and other organizations show a preference – intentionally or unintentionally – for more institutionalized organizations. On the other hand, it must also be recognized that the CBOs have created committee structures on their own or, in the case of SAFWAC, established structures that allow for long-term planning and the assessment of its activities. Moreover, leaders of both CBOs have expressed the desire to have more resources available to fund activities and to receive training in organizational management and leadership. This poses the question to what extent a form of NGO-ization is also desired by them. Still, the marginalization of CBOs in the urban refugee context of Cairo might also constitute a source of pressure to become more institutionalized.

A critical point to discuss is also to what extent NGO-ization processes can impact on the sense of community experienced in CBOs. As argued in Chapter 3, the Somali center in Maadi is much more informal in its structure than SAFWAC. However, the collective efforts

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<sup>341</sup>Sohela Nazneen and Maheen Sultan, "Struggling for Survival and Autonomy: Impact of NGO-ization on Women's Organizations in Bangladesh," *Development* 52, no. 2 (2009); Islah Jad, "The NGO-ization of Arab Women's Movement," *IDS Bulletin* 35, no. 4 (2004).

<sup>342</sup>Jad, "NGO-ization."

to sustain the center seem to have led to more horizontal decision-making structures and constitute a crucial factor for CBO members to feel connected to the place and to understand the CBO as an important part of their community. An increased formalization or institutionalization and more hierarchical structures might weaken such feelings of connection, belonging and collective ownership of all members.

### *5.3.2 Questions of Representation & Ownership*

As discussed in Chapter 1, external institutions can exert influence in the making of communities and the promotion of particular forms of refugee organizations, for instance by identifying certain groups as communities and regarding certain refugee organizations as their representatives.<sup>343</sup> One driving motive for this is the possibility to use such organizations as channels of providing services with easily identifiable homogeneous groups making it easier and less messy for external actors to work with. On the other hand, aid organizations often need to engage a certain ‘rhetoric of community’ in order to ensure funding for projects.<sup>344</sup> Possible risks are, however, that communities are artificially constructed and that oppressive hierarchies and structures within refugee groups are overlooked or even promoted.<sup>345</sup>

Concerning questions of representation and outreach, worries about fragmentation and ethnic- or clan-bias can be, in my point of view, diffused in the case of SAFWAC and the Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi. I am unable to determine how far both CBOs are able to reach out into their communities and can be judged as representing the interest of a wide range of Somalis in Cairo. I did not talk to Somalis in Hadayek el Maadi and Nasr City who are not involved in the CBOs in order to assess how those not directly involved in them perceive the role of SAFWAC or the Somali center in Maadi within the wider Somali

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<sup>343</sup>Griffiths et al., “Integrative Paradigms, Marginal Reality,” 892

<sup>344</sup>Hyndman, “Refugee Self-Management,” 16.

<sup>345</sup>Korac, “Remaking Home,” 31-23.

population. On exception are representatives of ESD who had a good impression of SAFWAC.<sup>346</sup> Moreover, Diric assured that he often heard Somali men in the Somali restaurants referring other Somalis to Nastexa when they needed assistance.<sup>347</sup> This is an indication that SAFWAC is acknowledged among at least some parts of the Somali population. Another indication in its favor is the high demand for its courses among Somali women. The Somali CBO in Maadi can be seen as a form of neighborhood cooperative that is realized through the collective contributions of its members and that is, according to its President, able to reach some 85 percent of Somalis in the area.<sup>348</sup> Furthermore, both SAFWAC and the center in Maadi are not clan-based. SAFWAC leaders clearly stressed their non-clan policy to me in several occasions. In Maadi, both Somalis from the south-central region as well as from Somaliland are members of the center. Consequently, both centers are potentially open to all Somalis. All these arguments allow for considering the CBOs as viable cooperation partners to strengthen refugee-led initiatives without running the risk of supporting fragmentary and biased structures that serve only a narrow proportion of Somalis.

Another aspect pertains to questions of ownership and the threat – if seen as such and wanted to be avoided – of the externally-infused construction of CBOs. Both SAFWAC and the Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi were created on the initiatives of Somalis who saw the need to fill certain gaps. As such, one can see it as a response to structural deficiencies (e.g. lack of service provision) and the political events of the Egyptian Revolution (e.g. recognition of communication gaps). The CBOs were created through the means of Somalis from within the community and not through externally-derived seed money coming. Moreover, Somalis in SAFWAC and the Somali center in Maadi created the internal structures on their own, for instance with regards to a committee or the CBOs' internal decision-making processes. These structures were not created on demand of outside actors.

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<sup>346</sup>Interview with the Chairman and two community leaders of ESD.

<sup>347</sup>Diric.

<sup>348</sup>Cilmi.

Still, certain worries can be raised with regards to the previously addressed issue of NGO-ization. The Somali CBOs cannot free themselves from financial dependencies when it comes to the aim to run educational activities. Both largely rely on the appropriation of Tadamon grants in order to organize activities that require resources and cannot solely be based on voluntary work. While the Head of Tadamon affirmed that receivers of its micro-grants have direct decision-making power in the implementation of those projects for which they received the grants, the CBOs might see themselves pressurized into conforming to externally determined norms, not at least concerning the tailoring of projects to the demands of donors.<sup>349</sup>

Another source of externally promoted appropriation can be linked to UNHCR's approach to promote a handful of Tadamon centers that serve all refugee nationalities. The idea of creating centers for all communities is certainly valuable under the consideration of creating 'bridging capital' between refugees of different background. Nastexa values the opportunities that their incorporation into the Tadamon framework provides with regards to being brought into contact with other refugee communities.<sup>350</sup> However, it should be noted that SAFWAC still mainly serves Somalis and that during all my time of going to the CBO I have not seen non-Somali students. Hence, SAFWAC receives all the practical benefits of being linked to Tadamon (coverage of rent, connections with other refugee communities) without having to give up its character of being a CBO catering for Somalis.

As I have shown in Chapter 3, CBO members treasured the fact that they had a place for Somalis to socialize. SAFWAC can provide this without facing financial setbacks. For the Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi, it is different. The option to share a center with the Oromo community was rejected when establishing a CBO because of the initiators' desire to

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<sup>349</sup>Kelly, "Bosnian Refugees in Britain," 35.

<sup>350</sup>Nastexa.

be independent and to have ownership over their center.<sup>351</sup> However, as Samakab explained, the financial pressure of coming up with enough money for rent each month needs them to consider to give up their own center and, instead, use the Tadamon center in Maadi, even if not desired by all its members. In this way, they see themselves pressurized into being consumed into the NGO-structure of Tadamon. If they become part of Tadamon, question arises to what extent they would still be able to exert independence. One aspect is, thereby, the extent to which they would be included into the decision-making and management structures of the Tadamon center. The Somali community leaders in Ard el-Liwa complained that they neither do possess keys of the Tadamon office nor are they able to convene meetings without making prior appointments. I visited several Tadamon centers and can say that they do not have separate rooms for different refugee communities to use according to their desire. While this might run against Tadamon's philosophy, one option to consider could be giving close-knitted and cohesive groups like the Somalis in Maadi the freedom to meet separately if wished so without losing the character of a 'center-for-all.'

### *5.3.3 Windows of Opportunities to Assist CBOs*

As stated in the opening of this chapter, CBOs have been identified to be vital sources of social capital and Cairo host numerous refugee-initiated CBOs. However, social capital has been assessed to often be neglected at the expense of humanitarian agencies' focus on financial and human capital.<sup>352</sup> When exploring options of how CBOs can be assisted, I would argue that the promotion of social, human and financial capital are not mutually exclusive, but can enhance one another. As has been demonstrated, SAFWAC and the Somali center in Maadi constitute important spaces for networking and support and, thus provide

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<sup>351</sup>Samatar.

<sup>352</sup>Eveliina Lyytinen and János Kullenberg, "Urban Refugee Research," 17.



platforms for building social capital, at least in the form of bonding capital among its members and linking capital with refugee service providers.

Assisting CBOs by providing them with financial capital (e.g. rent support, resources for activities) as well as human capital (e.g. provision of teachers, training for CBO leaders and volunteers) can, therefore, also equip CBOs with the opportunities to strengthen their role as sources of social capital. The Head of Tadamon mentioned that applicants for its micro-grants need to widen their horizon beyond “charity” projects like handicrafts and, moreover, link projects with economic and entrepreneur skills in order to make them more sustainable.<sup>353</sup> Hence, another option to consider would be to offer training in sustainable project management. An interesting question is also how projects like Tadamon’s provision of boxes to SAFWAC for women’s saving cooperatives (see Chapter 4, Section 4.3) build social capital or whether merely providing the equipment is insufficient and needs to be supplemented in order to create fruitful sources of social capital (e.g. by providing human capital skills in the form of training in budgeting and training).

I have not explored in detail through my research CBO leaders’ and members’ opinions about integration and about the idea to promote integration with Egyptians through initiatives at the CBO level (e.g. using the CBO space to create programs for Egyptians and Somalis). In this respect, I do not want to make assumptions about CBO’s willingness to foster bridging capital by other means than learning Arabic. However, the Somali center in Maadi handed in a proposal for a micro-grant that focuses on creating dialogue with Egyptians in the neighborhood through mutual-learning-meetings. Moreover, CBOs’ ability to consider such efforts would be enhanced if they were able to cooperate with local Egyptian organizations upon acquiring legal registration. So far, UNHCR does not assist CBOs in that

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<sup>353</sup>Head of Tadamon.

matter.<sup>354</sup> UNHCR should use its leverage to advocate with the Egyptian Government to facilitate CBOs' ability to gain legal security.

Humanitarian actors often find themselves in a balancing act between the aim to support sustainable projects and the accountability for their donations. A concern among UNHCR and Tadamon is that CBOs often lack the necessary organizational structures and management skills that ensure their efficacy.<sup>355</sup> The former UNHCR Assistant Community Service Officer described many CBOs in Cairo to be 'single-man-initiatives.' As he put it succinctly, it is a problem when one person has all files and then disappears. Moreover, one reason why UNHCR stopped its approach of giving financial aid for rent and supplies to CBOs and instead finances Tadamon centers was that many CBOs turned out to not run any activities although this was one decisive factor for UNHCR to approve assistance in the first place. Other identified problems pertained to the fact that many CBOs in Cairo are ethnic based and fragmented and usually led by those who are in power and in contact with UNHCR.<sup>356</sup> As explained in the previous section, both CBOs created organizational structures to run the center and make decisions. Additionally, they are not clan-based.

## 5.4 Conclusion

Both CBOs constitute sources of social capital – bonding, bridging and linking – for its members and external actors. They have opened up spaces for Somalis, especially women, to meet and supply, to different degrees, educational activities which enable Somalis to do something productive. In addition, they provide other forms of assistance as well as information. For external organizations, they can be seen as viable nodes of contact and gateways into refugee communities and, in this way, can play an important role when it comes to developing effective policy mechanisms and outreach strategies in urban refugee

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<sup>354</sup>UNHCR Senior Community Service Assistant.

<sup>355</sup>Head of Tadamon.

<sup>356</sup>Former UNHCR Assistant Community Service Officer.

contexts like Cairo. For refugees, CBOs can perform activities of advocacy. Their existence changes the political production and negotiation of needs and demands, as they constitute new entities or actors with which UNHCR and other organizations can interact, or have to interact, unless they want to risk creating further mistrust among refugees by ignoring them.

From a budgeting point of view as well as the idea to foster relationships between different refugee populations instead of financing fragmented CBOs, UNHCR's decision to change its strategy of community support by using its funds for Tadamon centers seems logic. A drawback, however, is that opportunities are dismissed to back up CBOs like the Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi that demonstrate cohesion and viable support structures for its members. Moreover, for any kind of external support – especially concerning CBOs' inclusion into the formal humanitarian regime and when affecting the internal structures of CBOs – one must be wary of the possible negative effects it can have with regards to CBOs' independence, ownership and internal dynamics. Thus, every attempt to support CBOs requires participatory and bottom-up approaches instead of top-down influencing that foster CBOs ownership and power over their organizational structures, activities decision-making mechanisms.

## Conclusion

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The night of February 26, 2014 which I described in the Introduction, when I found myself at the Cairo International Airport in the midst of Somalis involved in SAFWAC and the Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi who had come to say goodbye to two of their CBO members, constituted a key moment for me that made me understand the importance of the two CBOs in community formations among Somalis. Still, I remember having set many times before in both CBOs literally feeling a sense of togetherness.

When I started my research, my primary orientation was more practically oriented. My research geared at exploring the possible roles that CBOs do and can play in the urban refugee context of Cairo. ‘Roles’ is, of course, a broad and abstract term which can mean many things. What I meant was their possible role in providing assistance and opportunities of livelihoods; their possible role as linkages between refugees and organizations like UNHCR and other NGOs; their possible role in creating cohesion; and their possible role in fostering individual and collective agency. In the end, I found many of these ‘possible roles’ to apply to both CBOs: their role in giving hope to refugees by providing them with a shelter to go to and to seek help; their role in creating a safe space to socialize, connect and learn together; their role in creating cohesion among their members; their role in providing volunteers with the means to help others; their role in enabling their members to receive so much desired education; and their role in enabling everyone to be able to mutually help one another, and may it only be to listen to the sorrows of a fellow. More importantly, I realized that CBOs should not only be seen in the light of their possible efficacy in the urban refugee policy context. Their value lies much deeper in that they harbor possibilities for Somalis, especially refugees, to re-negotiate their identity, find spaces of community-making and (re-) claim agency.

Community formations have been shown to have multiple manifestations, making any attempt to pin community to fixed and unitary variables illusionary. In accordance with previous findings in the academic literature on forced migration, my research has shown that the process of displacement and the difficult circumstances in exile can be influencing factors in the identity constructions of Somalis. As I see it, the experience of ‘refugeeness,’ conceptualized by Malkki as a transformative process marked by displacement, flight and the experience of marginalization and dispossession of rights,<sup>357</sup> becomes linked to a form of ‘becoming Somali,’ a production and re-production of a sense of *soomaalinimo*. Somalis of different background and regional origin in Somalia connect in exile in ways they did not do before back home. Ripped off of family support structures from their homelands, many research participants expressed the need to create new connections and did so mainly among co-nationals. Al-Sharmani has talked about the variety of sources of identity construction that Somalis draw from in exile, including not only clan, but also newly established friendships, diasporic networks, livelihood strategies, and *soomaalinimo*.<sup>358</sup> Many of these aspects were discernable among my research participants, both at the individual level among each other and at the collective level of the CBOs.

SAFWAC and the Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi can be understood as a source of identity construction. They not only provide trajectories for community formations, but also for emplacement and agency of individuals. Manifestations of agency are multi-layered and multifaceted. Individual motivations and capacities as well as structural characteristics can play roles. In the same way that internal dynamics can inform notions of community within the framework of the CBOs, they can also influence the nature and flexibility of agency of different actors involved in the CBOs. However, in whatever way

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<sup>357</sup> Malkki, “Purity and Exile.”

<sup>358</sup> Al-Sharmani, “Diasporic Somalis in Cairo”; Al-Sharmani, “Living Transnationally”; Al-Sharmani, “Refugees and Citizens.”

people become active in the CBOs, they are able to encounter notions of refugeeness and defy images of refugees as helpless and dependent subjects.

The internal dynamics and structures of SAFWAC and the Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi differ. I traced this back to the different purposes for which the CBOs were created, and by whom, and the CBOs' different degrees of inclusion or exclusion into the NGO-regime of Tadamon. SAFWAC seems to me more like having the character of an educational center, established by a group of Somali female students with the purpose to create a space for women and children. The Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi can be better described as a Somali neighborhood cooperative, being kept alive by the joint commitment of its members. This and its looser and less institutionalized structure compared to that of SAFWAC seem to have fostered more inclusionary forms of decision-making. The relative isolation of a small number of Somalis from larger Somali populations in other parts of the city also generated more spatially-bound notions of community which became linked to the CBO.

CBOs like SAFWAC and the Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi can constitute valuable entities in developing effective and viable strategies to provide for refugees in urban settings like Cairo. Against the background of oftentimes restrictive rights, limited opportunities for livelihood generation or assistance, and socio-economically and politically unstable conditions it is a timely contribution to considering the promotion of sustainable community-based formations of support in urban settings of developing countries. It can be seen as one stepping stone to rethink the existing camp-based model of UNHCR and to put its new Urban Refugee Policy into practice.

However, it must be acknowledged that any incorporation of CBOs into humanitarian regimes cannot engender effects that are necessarily positive for those CBOs. The different degrees of institutionalization and formalization of SAFWAC and the Somali Community in

Hadayek el Maadi have not only influenced internal senses of community ownership and participation, but also the ways they are perceived by external humanitarian actors. SAFWAC's existing professionalism has, among others, opened doors for its inclusion into the umbrella NGO of Tadamon and to receive financial funding from UNHCR for rent. It seems that CBOs which show more characteristics of an NGO receive more attention and are regarded as potentially more viable options for support. This, however, leads to the dismissal of important functions that looser and less formalized CBOs like the Somali center in Maadi provide for Somalis connected to it. Moreover, it shows how community outreach strategies of UNHCR and other organizations can indirectly pressurize CBOs to become incorporated into the formal humanitarian regime. While UNHCR's decision to finance Tadamon centers open for all refugees are an interesting approach, one should not lose sight of the possible negative effects it can have for CBOs outside this framework. It is one example that requires us to pay attention to the manifestations and consequences of community outreach approaches by humanitarian actors.

The emergence of CBOs arguably changes the landscape of policy-making within the urban refugee regime in Cairo. As was previously in the case of NGO the establishment of new NGOs like AMERA, PSTIC and Tadamon, CBO constitute new kind of actors at a grassroots level on the playing field of policy making and advocacy. This development transcends the traditional direct UNHCR-refugees or UNHCR-NGOs-refugees relationship networks by adding CBOs to the site of refugees. Moreover, the CBOs can provide windows of opportunities to influence and transform the oftentimes inhumane practices of population management of biopolitics by engaging in advocacy for refugees' needs and rights at a more organized level. Both UNHCR and CBOs themselves should try to benefit from it by working towards the creation of closer channels of communication.

One major conclusion I want to draw is that CBOs should be cherished for their role in creating a sense of togetherness for refugees who have lost familiar social support structures upon their flight. In this way, UNHCR and other actors which have declared themselves to work and advocate on behalf of the rights and wellbeing of refugees, should embrace the opportunity to value each CBO on its own term and try to support them in tapping their full potentials without creating structures that exert tensions and pressures on CBOs or endangers their independence and ownership. By supporting CBOs, they are not only able to help refugees to gain and regain agency, but also allow for a levelling of the playing field of the urban refugee regime by giving refugees platforms through which they can express their voices more easily and loudly. In a way, they can hence counter tendencies of treating refugee populations as an undifferentiated mass of people which is unfortunately still the rule rather than the exception.

Let me end this thesis by raising some questions for future research that I was not able or failed to address in this research. First of all, I have to acknowledge that I did not make enough inquiries into different legal and socio-economic conditions of refugees, students and émigrés in order to provide a more nuanced and clear discussion of these various categories and how possible variations manifest themselves. I could have done more in exploring these categories vis-à-vis the context of work of the CBOs and look at how they implicate other contexts in which Somali CBO members who either identify with a category or are identified by others as one of these categories move in complex ways between different structures.

Secondly, it would be of interest to gain insight into what linkages can be drawn between the two Somali CBOs and the Somali diaspora in all its multi-layered complexities (including translocal networking, livelihoods generation and identity constructions). To what extent do Xoriyo's and Diric's engagement in the CBOs, for example, benefit them in Canada today? Do former CBO member build on their past experiences by creating similar projects in



their countries of resettlement? Are CBOs, in this regard, able to induce inspirations and, hence, gain meanings beyond the boundaries of Cairo?

Thirdly, I certainly discovered only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to both the CBOs' standings in the wider Somali population in Cairo as well as their embeddedness in the organizational and institutional landscape of the refugee service provision and human rights advocacy sectors. The former calls for exploring the CBOs from the angle of Somali non-members in order to capture perceptions, views and understandings about both CBOs from multiple perspectives. In this respect, it would be interesting to look at how the CBOs are linked to other forms of organizing, such as community meetings in Somali cafés and households<sup>359</sup> and how this, in turn, is intertwined with processes of community formation and negotiations of new and old local identities. A closer ethnographic look at the CBOs' involvement in demonstrations of Somalis against UNHCR, or other forms of advocacy and claims-making, would be another encouraging point of departure. Concerning the CBOs entanglement in the urban refugee service provision regime, one could conduct interviews among more refugee service providers and advocacy groups to gain additional insight into their perspectives and views on aspects of tensions, synergies and cooperation with CBOs. In this respect, it would also be fruitful to think about more participatory methodologies that bring together CBO members and staff of NGOs, charity-based, humanitarian and human rights organizations.

Finally, research can also be broadened in its scope by looking at other CBOs. On the one hand, it would be more than promising to incorporate the Somali NGO ESD in a comparative analysis with SAFWAC and the Somali center in Maadi. ESD differs from the other two Somali associations in that it is legally registered and has brought on board Egyptians into its project, if only in name and through signatures to acquire legal recognition.

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<sup>359</sup> Al-Sharmani, "Refugees and Citizens," 238.

A comparison could allow for identifying more in depth the possible benefits of legalization, trajectories of cooperation and networking relationships with Egyptian institutions, and local organizations as well as Somali CBOs' potential roles in logics and efforts of integration. On the other hand, one could also conduct a meta-analysis and extend this research to other non-Somali CBOs (including even local Egyptian CBOs). This could be done with the intentions to learn about what other groupings and association are doing and what roles they may play in community formation, empowerment and emplacement as well as to extract more reflections about how different forms and degrees of formalization and institutionalization can inform CBOs' agency and their relational position in the urban refugee regime of Cairo.

Through this project, I hope to have added the voices of a varied Somali population in Cairo to scholarly debates on various aspects of the contemporary refugee and forced migration discourse, humanitarian aid practices in urban refugee contexts, and the ethnographic literature on Somalis. My findings show that there is no one-size-fits-all answer to the problematic of providing protection and assistance and support for emplacement and belonging in an urban refugee context, but that everything must be seen in relation to various contexts and levels of analysis. On the other hand it crystallizes that there are pockets of possibilities for refugees and migrants, researchers and practitioners that can further be explored and exploited. I also hope to have given justice to my research participants concerning their multiple and layered perceptions, meanings and understandings of SAFWAC and the Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi and their own position within them.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Interviewees

### 1. Interviews with CBO Leaders, Members & Volunteers

Pseudonym/Name	Sex	Affiliation to CBO	Date of Interview
<b>At the Somali Association for Women and Children</b>			
Faadi*	Female	CBO leaders	30 November 013
Farhan*	Male		12 November 2013
Kahdra*	Female		2 November 2013
Nasro*	Female		17 December 2013
Nastexa*	Female		26 November 2013
Rukia*	Female		2 November 2013
Salma*	Female		2 November 2013
Subeyda*	Female		28 November 2013
Caaisho**	Female	CBO members	6 March 014
Dahabo**	Female		6 March 2014
Ubax**	Female		6 March 2014
Xalwo**	Female		6 March 2014
Diric**	Male	CBO volunteer	25 November 2013
<b>At the Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi</b>			
Cilmi**	Male	CBO leaders	27 October 2013
Filsan**	Female		12 October 2013
Samakab**	Male		13 November 2013
Samatar**	Male		10 October 2013
Xoriyo**	Female		28 October 2013
Alemo**	Female	CBO members	1 November 2013
Feynuus**	Female		13 November 2013
Ladan**	Female		25 October 2013
Shamso**	Female		28 November 2013
Siman**	Female		19 November 2013
Xirsi**	Male		8 November 2013
Wabeeri**	Male	CBO members & volunteers	10 December 2013
Warsame**	Male		6 December 2013

\* Real name      \*\* Pseudonym

## 2. Focus Group Discussions with CBO Leaders & Members

CBO	Affiliation to CBO	Names /Number of Participants (sex)	Date
Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi	CBO leaders	All five leaders (2xf, 3xm)	29 September 2013
	CBO members	Laden** (f) , Feynuus** (f), Caaliya** (f)	14 November 2013
Somali Association for Women and Children	CBO Members	Six students (f)	14 December 2013

\*\* Pseudonym

## 3. Interviews outside the CBOs

Organization	Position	Date
<b>Refugee Service Providers</b>		
AMERA	Somali Community Outreach Officer	3 September 2013
UNHCR	UNHCR Senior Community Service Assistant	14 November 2013
	Former UNHCR Assistant Community Service Officer.	25 November 2013
Tadamon	Head of Tadamon	26 March 2014
<b>Somalis engaged in other CBOs/community work</b>		
Somali Community in Ard el-Liwa (no CBO!)	2 Elected Community Leaders	28 October 2013
Egyptian-Somali for Development (CBO)	President & 2 other CBO leaders	29 March 2014

## **Appendix B: Interview/Focus Groups Discussion Guides**

### 1. Interview Guide for Leaders of SAFWAC/Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi

#### *Personal background*

1. Can you tell me a bit about your personal background such as your age, when you came to Cairo and your current circumstances here?
2. When did you start going to the CBO or get involved in it? What is your position in the CBO?

#### *About the CBO*

*I would like to ask you now some questions to learn more about the history, activities and structure of the CBO.*

#### *History & Goals*

3. How did the CBO you are involved in come into being and how did it develop over time, including the time before and after an office was set up?
4. What were the main motivating factors for creating this CBO?
  - a. What does the organization try to accomplish? What are its main goals? Is it able to reach these goals?
  - b. Did soomaalinimo play a role?
5. Who does the CBO mainly serve? (*Probe on importance of different factors such as gender, age, legal status, length of stay in Cairo.*)
6. Did and does the CBO play any role with regards to responding to the effects of political events and upheavals since the January 25 Revolution in January 2011? (*Probe January 2011 and June 2013*)

#### *Internal Structure*

7. How is this CBO funded?
8. How many members does the CBO have?
9. Does the CBO target any specific groups within the Somali community and, if yes, for what reasons? In other words, who are the main beneficiaries?
10. What are the main activities that the CBO has organized in the past and is currently organizing? What is the purpose of these activities? Can you explain to me how these activities typically look like?
  - a. Do you hold meetings in which you discuss issues of concern to Somalis in the neighborhood or Cairo at large?
11. Who decides what activities are organized within the CBO?
12. Are there different posts in the CBO (e.g. board, treasurer) and if yes how is it decided who holds these positions? How long does one person usually hold this position?
13. How does the CBO deal with internal conflicts, disagreements or complaints?

- a. What happens in the event that some or the majority of CBO members are not happy with the performance of a person holding an official position within the CBO?

### *Strengths & Weaknesses*

14. What are the main strengths and resources that the CBO has?
15. Are there any challenges and problems the CBO faces? If yes, can you please explain what kind of and what consequences they have!
  - a. Are there any policies (e.g. Egyptian law, UNHCR) that constrain the CBO in any way? Does the fact that you are not officially registered as an NGO constitute a problem for the CBO?
16. Is there anything you feel that is missing in what the CBO provides?
17. Would you like to see any changes in the CBO? If yes, what kind of changes and why?

### *External relations*

18. Does the CBO cooperate with other Somali organizations here in Cairo and, if yes, in what ways?
19. Does the CBO interact with other organizations such as UNHCR or other organizations that provide services for refugees (e.g. AMERA, refugee schools, Tadamon)? If yes, how do these relationships look like?
20. Does the CBO have relationships with other refugee communities (such as Sudanese, Ethiopians or Eritreans)?
21. Does the CBO have relationships with Egyptian organizations or Egyptians within the neighborhood?
22. Does the CBO have relationships with other organizations and/or people (Somali or non-Somali) outside of Egypt?

### *Personal Experiences & Agency*

*(Now, I would like to talk with you a bit about more about your personal experience in the CBO and how it affects your life.)*

23. What role does the CBO play in your life?
24. What does motivate you personally to become involved?
25. How do you experience your involvement in the CBO? Has it changed or added anything in your life here in Cairo?
26. Have you been involved in similar or other kinds of activism/activities before either here in Cairo or in Somalia or other countries you lived in?

### *Role of CBO in the Somali Community*

*(I would now like to talk with you more about the role of the CBO in the community.)*

27. What impact, if any, did the creation of the CBO have for Somalis in Cairo?
28. How do you think the CBO is perceived by others outside the CBO?

29. How is the CBO connected to other structures among Somalis (e.g. elders, other potential Somali support groups, Somali student organizations etc.)
30. Does the Somali CBO contribute to enhanced collective activism or community cohesion among Somalis? If yes, in what ways?
  - a. Did the CBO contribute to soomaalinimo?

#### *Urban Refugee Framework*

31. What role does the CBO play in the Cairo's urban refugee policy framework?
32. How do you assess how UNHCR is working together with your CBO or with Somalis in general?
  - a. Are they doing enough?
  - b. *If not:* What could be improved?

#### *Wrap Up*

33. Is there anything else that you want to add that you feel is important for me to know?

## 2. Interview Guide for CBO members

*(Note: Instead of CBO I mention either SAFWAC or the Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi)*

#### *Personal Background*

1. Can you tell me a bit about your personal background (age, legal status, marital status, circumstances in Egypt)?

#### *Involvement in CBO & Agency*

2. When did you start going to this CBO? How are you involved in it?
3. Are you involved in making decisions concerning the CBO? If yes, how?

#### *Perceptions & Opinions of CBO*

4. Can you describe to me this place and how it feels to be here? (Alternative: What is it like to be here?)
5. In what ways can the CBO help you and in what not (probe for examples)?
6. What does the CBO, and your involvement in it, mean in your life? (Alternative: What has changed in your life since you come to this CBO?)
7. Would you like the CBO to do things they are currently not doing?
8. Are there other support structures here in Egypt you can rely on or places you can go to for help (e.g. family inside and outside Egypt, friends, mosque, other groups/organizations)?

#### *Role of CBO in Somali Community*



9. What does the word community (bulshuur) mean in your opinion?
10. Do you think that Somalis here in Cairo form a community?
  - a. Did the CBO contribute to more cohesion among Somalis? If yes, in what ways?
11. What does soomaalinimo mean to you?
  - a. Does the CBO create more soomaalinimo? If yes, in what ways?

#### *Wrap up*

12. Is there anything else that you want to add that you feel is important for me to know?

### 3. Guide for Focus Group Discussions

#### *Community*

1. What does the word 'community' mean to you?
2. Would you describe Somalis here in Cairo as a 'community'? Why or why not?
  - a. Have relationships between Somalis changed here in Cairo compared to Somalia? In other words: How different is this community (if it is there) from what you had at home?

#### *Challenges for Somalis & Somali Refugee*

3. What are the main problems Somalis face here in Cairo?
4. Who are the most vulnerable people among the Somalis here in Cairo? What makes them vulnerable?
5. What does the term 'refugee' mean to you?
  - a. Who among the Somalis in Cairo are considered refugees?

#### *Perceptions of the CBO*

6. What has the CBO achieved so far for Somalis in Cairo?
7. Where does the CBO reach its limits in terms of being able to help Somalis here in Cairo? Why is this so?
8. (*Earlier we talked about what community means and whether a community exists*). Does the Somali CBO contribute to some form of greater community cohesion or greater activism among Somalis?
9. There are other potential sources of support and gathering/socializing for Somalis, such as mosques, neighborhood and friendship networks, family's abroad, Somali student organizations, restaurants (e.g. to receive information), and NGOs like AMERA and Caritas etc. What role does the CBO play for Somalis in comparison to these places? How does its role differ compared to these other forms of socializing?
10. What future do you see for the CBO?<sup>360</sup>

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<sup>360</sup>Probe for views about expectations of rationally possible achievements, but also participants dreams about what they would like the CBO to be in the future and change and change in the community

#### 4. Interview Guide for Somali Community Outreach Officer at AMERA

##### *Somali demography in Cairo*

1. Can you please outline for me the main demographic characteristics that describe the Somali 'community' in Cairo!
  - Do you think that Somali's legal status, that is, whether they have a yellow card, a blue card or citizenship of a country other than Somalia, or whether they are students from Somalia studying here in Egypt, plays a significant role in describing differing socio-economic and/or social statuses and/or power relations among Somalis?
2. Can you please describe to me where Somalis live in Cairo, the different demographic compositions and the respective numbers in each part.

##### *Historical overview of Somali Organizing & CBOs*

*(Before talking more in depth about the main Somali CBOs currently existing in Cairo, I would like to talk now first about organizing practices among Somalis in general, including CBOs, but also other forms of organizing.)*

3. What are the main forms of collective organizing activities for Somalis here in Cairo, including not only CBOs but also to other forms of organizing? Have they changed over time?
4. Who are the main actors and what are their motivations to do so? Have they changed over time?
5. When, why and how did Somalis start to create CBOs with an office base?
  - As far as I understand there are currently three main Somali CBOs in Cairo (SAFWAC, ESD, Somali Community in Maadi). Were there other initiatives in the past to create similar CBOs and if so why they do not exist anymore or why they did not come into being?
  - Why is there no Somali CBO in Ard el-Liwawhere a significant number of Somalis live?
  - Are there plans among Somalis to create new CBOs?

##### *Somali Community Organizations (SAFWAC, Somali Community in Hadayek el Maadi, ESD)*

*(Now I would like to talk about the three main Somali CBOs currently existing here in Cairo.)*

6. Can you tell me how each of each of them started and evolved over time until today, including both the time before and after they set up an office!
7. In what ways does AMERA work with each CBO together? If AMERA has no collaboration, why is this so?
8. In your opinion, what are each CBO's strengths?
9. What challenges does each CBO face?

## 5. Interview Guide for Head of Tadamon

### *About Tadamon*

1. Can you explain to me the concept of Tadamon and its main activities, please?
2. In what relationship do you stand to UNHCR as its implementing partner? How do you work together?
3. Can you tell me more about Tadamon's micro-grant project?

### *Tadamon & SAFWAC*

4. How and why did Tadamon choose SAFWAC as a Tadamon center?
5. How is SAFWAC incorporated into the Tadamon network? Did SAFWAC remain independent as an organization?
6. You once told me that you found it incredible how the community work of the Somali female students who created SAFWAC developed over the years. Could you elaborate a bit more on that?
7. How do you work together with SAFWAC?
  - a. Do you use the Tadamon center to work with refugees of other nationalities?
  - b. Do you support SAFWAC in any ways other than paying its rent?

### *Other Somali Communities*

8. Is Tadamon in contact with other Somali communities, for example in Maadi and Ard el-Liwa?
  - a. If yes, in what form?
  - b. If not, why and do you plan to change this in the future?

### *Urban Refugee Policy Framework*

9. What is your opinion about UNHCR's urban refugee policies with regards to its outreach strategy to refugee communities?
  - a. What role does Tadamon play?
  - b. What role do CBOs play in the urban refugee framework?
  - c. How do you assess the potentials and challenges to include CBOs into urban refugee provision mechanisms?
  - d. How do or could organizations like Tadamon and UNHCR support CBOs?

### *Wrap Up*

10. Is there anything else that you want to add that you feel is important for me to know?

## 6. Interview Guide for UNHCR

1. What is the approach of the UNHCR Cairo office in community outreach?
2. What are your objectives? What are the objectives of the Community Service Team?
  - a. Have you achieved these objectives?
  - b. What are challenges?
3. How do you assess the effectiveness/successfulness of your approach?
  - a. What are your assessment criteria/indicators?
4. Has it changed over time?
5. What role do CBOs play? What relationships does UNHCR have with CBOs in Cairo, and especially with Somali CBOs?
  - a. *If CBOs play a role:* What advantages do CBOs have that UNHCR can benefit from in its community outreach?
  - b. Do you see any challenges in working with CBOs?
6. Do you meet with other groups than CBOs?
7. How do you see UNHCR can support CBOs?
  - a. Does UNHCR help CBO concerning legal registration?

*If UNHCR has meetings with CBOs:*

8. What do you discuss on these meetings? What are Somalis' main concerns they address?
9. Who sets the agenda for such meetings?
10. What happens after a meeting? How do you follow up?

*If not addressed yet:*

11. How do you work with Tadamon and PSTIC?

## 7. Interview Guide for Somali Community Leaders in Ard el-Liwa

*Personal Background*

1. Can you tell me a bit about your personal background such as your age, when you came to Cairo and your current circumstances here?
2. How are you involved in community work for Somalis in Ard el-Liwa/Cairo?

*Somalis in Cairo*

3. How many Somalis do live in Ard el-Liwa and its vicinities?
4. What are the living conditions for Somalis here in Ard el-Liwa and Egypt in general?

*Former CBO*

5. Can you tell me about the former CBO you used to be involved with?
  - a. When and why was it established?

- b. What were your main activities?
- 6. Why was the CBO closed?
- 7. What did the closure of the CBO mean for Somalis here in Cairo?

#### *Advocacy/Contact with UNHCR and Other Organizations*

- 8. Do you or Somalis in general use the Tadamon center in Ard el-Liwa? If yes, what for?
- 9. Do Somalis here in Cairo still have some form or organizational activities?
- 10. Are you in contact with UNHCR or other organizations?

#### *Wrap Up*

- 11. Is there anything else that you want to add that you feel is important for me to know?

### 8. Interview Guide for Leaders of ‘Somali-Egyptian for Development’

#### *Personal Background*

- 1. Can you tell me a bit about your personal background such as your age, when you came to Cairo and your current circumstances here?

#### *ESD*

- 2. How did the CBO come into being and how did it develop over time?
- 1. What were the main motivating factors for creating this CBO?
  - a. What does the organization try to accomplish? What are its main goals? Are you able to reach these goals?
  - b. What are the main challenges this CBO is facing?
- 2. Who does the CBO mainly serve? (*Probe on importance of different factors such as gender, age, legal status, length of stay in Cairo.*)
- 3. What activities are you running or used to run in the past?
- 4. What are the advantages of being legally registered?

#### *External Relations*

- 5. Are you in contact with other Somali CBOs such as SAFWAC and the Somali Community Center in Hadayek el Maadi? If yes, in what ways?
- 6. What is your position/role in the Somali population?
  - a. Are you in contact with Somali elders?
- 7. Are you in contact with other organizations such as UNHCR, Tadamon and AMERA?

#### *Urban Refugee Framework*

- 8. What role does ESD play in the Cairo’s urban refugee policy framework, if any?

- a. Are you able to influence refugee policies in any ways?
- 9. How do you assess how UNHCR is working together with your CBO or with Somalis in general?
  - a. Are they doing enough?
  - b. *If not:* What could be improved?

*Wrap Up*

- 10. Is there anything else that you want to add that you feel is important for me to know?

## Appendix C: Oral Consent Form



### Documentation of Informed Consent for Participation in Research Study

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#### Oral Consent Template

*Note: The following statements will be read to the prospective research participant. If the he/she has no questions and understood everything, he/she will ask whether he agrees to participate. This will be recorded orally and by ticking the box at the bottom of the page together with indicating the name.*

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**Project Title:** Community-Based Activism among Somalis in Cairo - The Role of Community-based Organizations

**Principal Investigator:** Hannah Huser (01204594699; h.huser@aucegypt.edu)

\*You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of the research is to explore the role that Somali community-based organizations play for Somalis and in the current urban refugee context of Cairo and the findings may be published and presented. The expected duration of your participation is 2-4 hours.

The procedures of the research will be as follows. I invite you and other Somalis to take part in interviews and focus group discussions. If you agree to participate, I will ask you questions about your opinions and experiences about the CBO you are a member of and your involvement in it as well as its role in the Somali community.

\*There will be certain risks or discomforts associated with this research. Talking to me about your experiences, especially with regard to sensitive topics such as displacement or difficult circumstances here in Cairo, might be difficult and trigger distress, sadness or other negative feelings.

\*There will not be benefits to you from this research apart from compensation for transportation costs. However, by participating in this research, you will contribute to research concerning urban refugees. This work will make policy recommendations to support community-based organizations and might have positive effects for Somali and other refugee communities in the long run.

\*The information you provide for purposes of this research is confidential. I will not reveal any identifying information you provide in my written work or verbally, such as proper names, residence, or contact information. Instead, I will use codes or pseudonyms in my notes, thesis and future publications.

\*Please feel always free to contact me for answers to questions about the research and your rights as a research participant and in the event of research-related problems for you.

\*Participation in this study is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or the loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Oral consent given \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_



### Waraaqda wargalinta ogolaanshaha ka qaybqaataaha cilmi baadhis wax barasho

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**Mawduuca mashruuca:** wax qabadka urur bulsheedka u leeyahay somalida Qahirad- Dooraka urur bulsheedyada.

**Maamulaha cilmi badhishta:** Hannah Huser (01204594699; [h.huser@aucegypt.edu](mailto:h.huser@aucegypt.edu))

- Waxaa lagu waydinayaa inaad ka qayb qadato cilmi badhis wax barasho. U jeedada cilmi badhistu waa in la ogaado dooraka urur bulsheedyadu ka ciyaraan somalida iyo fahamka guud ee qaxootiga magaladan qaahiraad waqtigan. Waxii ka soo baxa waa la soo daabici donaa wana la soo bandhigi donaa. Waqtiga la rajaynayo inuu qaato ka qaybqadashadaadu waa 2-4 sacadood.
- Habka ay raacayso cilmi baadhistu waa sidan soo socota. Waxaan kugu martiqaadaya adiga iyo Somali kale inaad ka qaybqadataan waraysiyada iyo falanqaynta guruubyada. Hadaad ogolaato inaad ka qayb qadato waxaan ku waydiin donaa su'aalo ku saabsan fikirkaaga iyo khibradaad ku aadan urur bulsheedyada aad xubinta ka tahay Iyo ka qayb qadashadaada. Sidoo kale dooraka uu urur bulsheedku ku leeyahay bulshada somaliyeed.
- Waxaa jiro doona oxogaa dhibatao ah ama aan ku rali galin oo laga yaabo inay weheliyaan cilmi badhistan. Sida markaad igala hadlayso waxyabahii aad soo martay ee xasaasiga ah sida barakac ama duruufaha adag ee halkan qaahira. Waxa laga yabaa inay adkadaan kuguna keenaan murugo, tiiranyo, ama dareen naxdin leh oon fiicnayn.
- Waxa faaiido dhaqaale ah ood ka helayso cilmi badhistani ma jirto marka laga yimaado in lagu siiyo qarashka kaaga baxay bas raaca. Hayeeshee ka qaybqadashada cilmi badhistan waxaad wax ku taraysa cilmi badhis khusaysa dadka qaxootiga ah. Shaqadani waxay soo jeedin dontaa siyasado lagu tageerayo urur bulsheedyada taasina waxaa laga yabaa inay wax tar u yeelato bulshada somaliyeed iyo bushooyinka kale ee qaxootiga ahba mustaqbalka durugsan.
- Maclumaadka aad la wadaagtay cilmi badhistani waxuu noqonayaa mid sir ah. Cidna maculumaadka aad ii sheegtay uma sheegayo ha ahaato mid qoraala ama mid afka ahba sida magacyada, degaanka ama cinwaano. Waxaan isticmaali donaa calaamado ama xuruuf sireed qoraalada buugayga ama daabacaadaha mustaqbalka.
- Fadlan si xor ah ayaad iila soo xidhiidhi karta si aad uga jawaabto su'alaha ku saabsan cilmi badhistan waxaanad xaq u leedahay sida ka qayb qaate cilmi badhiseed.
- Ka qaybqadashada darasadani waa mid tadawuc ah. Hadaad diido inaad ka qayb qadato wax ciqab ah ama faaido daro ah oo aad wajahayso ma jirto. Waxaad joojin kartaa ka qayb qadashad darasada xiligaad doonto iyadoo wax ciqaab ahi ku soo food sarayn ama xaq aad lahayd aan wayayn.

Waraaqda ogolaanshaha waa laysiyay \_\_\_\_\_

Magacoo Daabacan \_\_\_\_\_

Tariikh \_\_\_\_\_